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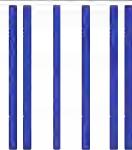


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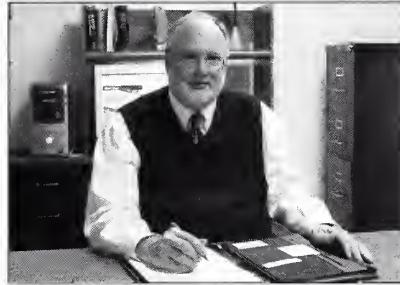
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Dana Heupel



A few tips on how to be greener

by Dana Heupel

I generally try to follow this well-known admonition of my era: Think globally, act locally.

However, I also must agree with another famous slogan — more from my son's era, actually — by that astute amphibian Kermit: It's not easy being green.

I do make an attempt. I'm diligent about recycling the stacks of newspapers and magazines that seem to magically gather at my house. Bottles and cans, not so much. I try to remember to turn off lights when I leave a room, and I keep my home thermostat set at slightly above the point where I can see my breath in the winter, and slightly below the point where I break into a sweat in the summer. My wife and I have one four-cylinder car that gets good mileage but one SUV that could be better. Pretty basic stuff, actually. I know I should do much more.

The university where this magazine is based is environmentally conscious, with a "green roof" on one residence building and frequent suggestions for a more sustainable work and study environment, such as green purchasing rec-

There are some small, less costly things we all can do locally to perhaps better preserve the globe for succeeding generations.

ommendations. As for *Illinois Issues*, we do use soy-based ink, and our covers are printed on recycled paper but not the inside pages — we simply can't afford it at this point. And that's a problem that overrides a lot of sustainability concerns in a down economy: Often, being green takes more greenbacks.

Still, there are some small, less costly things we all can do locally to perhaps better preserve the globe for succeeding generations. I've culled the following personal list from various sources. Some I was aware of; others are new to me. In no particular order:

- Install light dimmers. I have done that in many rooms in my house and found that it not only saves energy and

makes conventional light bulbs last longer but allows me to establish different lighting atmospheres for different rooms. But I still have several rooms without dimmers, so I'll buy energy-saving compact fluorescent lights for them. You can't use the regular CFLs with dimmers, but you can find specially made ones that you can, and I'll look into that, as well.

- Unplug the cell phone charger when not in use. Mine is normally plugged in at the office because the outlet is behind a desk, and I have to lie on my back and reach up behind to disconnect it. I promise to get a power strip that will make it easier for me to follow that recommendation.

- Take shorter showers to conserve water, or at least use low-flow shower heads. I do have a low-flow shower, but I confess to sometimes lingering longer than I need for cleanliness. I'll try to find another, more environmentally friendly wake-up routine.

- Don't rinse plates before putting them into the dishwasher. That makes sense. Why use twice as much water?
- Avoid antibacterial hand soap,

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which not only kills the bad bacteria but also the good ones. It's necessary in the medical field, I discover, but washing with plain old soap and water for 15 seconds will do the trick most of the time. I certainly can cut back.

- Use durable products instead of disposable. My wife does take reusable bags to the grocery store, and I do have my own coffee cup and plastic water bottle at work. I can, however, try to rely less on paper plates and plastic sandwich bags for my lunch.

- Write with refillable ink pens and mechanical pencils. Hmmm. Never thought about that. I do have both in my briefcase, but I usually use the throwaway kind for normal business chores.

- Use solar calculators that don't have disposable batteries. I earn a check mark on that, but I do it more for convenience than sustainability. I'll look around the office to see what everybody else has.

- Buy rechargeable batteries. I do have some, but I can use more. I'm constantly replacing batteries in remote controls, flashlights, digital voice recorders, my handheld GPS, smoke detectors. ... I think I can probably save some money as well as help the environment.

- Wrap presents creatively with newspapers, paper bags, old maps, etc. Another suggestion I never thought about. Perhaps I can find multiple uses for other disposable items, as well.

That's my personal list of 10 relatively easy and inexpensive things I can do to live a greener life. Many other tips can be easily found through an Internet search. Perhaps all of us can make our own simple lists and do a little more to safeguard the environment.

It's only fitting that Beverley Scobell chose to retire from her 19-year career at *Illinois Issues* with this month's environmental edition. She has added a scientific and environmental dimension to the magazine for many years with feature articles and



Beverley Scobell

Briefly items about such subjects as white-nosed syndrome in bats, conservation and clean air and water issues, among many others. Her latest feature is this month's piece on how trees and plants can renew contaminated soil. (See page 29.)

Beverley began at the magazine in 1985, while still an undergraduate at then-Sangamon State University, and she has worn many hats during her stint here. As our projects editor, she helped edit several books. She has worked behind the scenes for many years as our chief copy editor and as supervisor to our graduate research assistant in fact-checking our articles. She also oversaw the production of our annual *Roster of State Government Officials*. Along with her articles on science and the environment, she has written extensively about education, culture and politics.

We will all miss her expertise and her enthusiastic and gentle demeanor. As another old-school grammar geek, I will particularly miss our fervent discussions about such arcane issues as reflexive pronouns and subjunctive mood. Luckily for me, she'll only be a phone call away if I have a question in those areas that I can't answer.

Beverley intends to spend her time in the immediate future tending to her garden and a daughter's upcoming wedding. We wish her the best and hope she can still find the time to occasionally lend her talents to *Illinois Issues*. □

Dana Heupel can be reached at heupel.dana@uis.edu.

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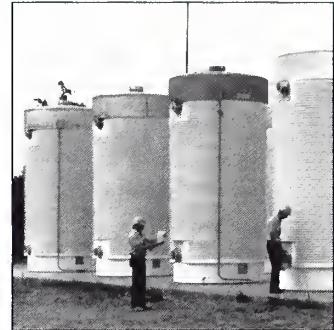


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Credits: The issue was designed by Patty Sullivan. The photograph on the cover was taken by Chris Young.

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Jamey Dunn



Quinn's plastic bag tax might have cut down on use

by Jamey Dunn

Facing an unprecedented deficit, Illinois politicians pulling together a state budget with little public or legislative support for an income tax increase had to get creative when looking for new revenue sources.

One tax proposal could have helped Illinois make a dent in a waste problem that is getting attention across the country and overseas.

Gov. Pat Quinn floated a plan that included taxes on various items such as music and movie downloads and plastic grocery bags. Some ideas from the package made it into the final budget bill: extending the “lapse period” from August to December, giving the state more time to pay bills from the previous fiscal year; and a “securitization” plan to generate some immediate cash from a national tobacco settlement. However, the new taxes were shot down within a matter of days.

According to Quinn's Office of Management and Budget, the plastic bag tax could have brought in \$100 million, but little attention was drawn to the fact that such a tax also has the potential to cut down on the use of plastic bags.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency estimates Americans use 380 billion plastic bags and wraps a year. While the estimated recycling rate for bags varies, all the projections are pretty abysmal. About 5 percent is the highest estimate.

Most bags are made from non-renewable resources: natural gas and petroleum. Many reusable bags that stores sell are, too. But at least they are not tossed out after one use.

China and Bangladesh have banned bags, and the United Nations has encouraged other countries to follow suit. Ireland imposed a tax on them. In America, San Francisco banned single-use bags, and the California legislature is considering a statewide ban.

Most disposable bags are made from nonrenewable resources: natural gas and petroleum. Many reusable bags that stores sell are, too. But at least they are not tossed out after one use. Disposable bags can take up to 1,000 years to decompose in a landfill, but they often end up as litter. Even after being properly disposed of, their ability to catch the wind often liberates them into fields, trees, rivers or wherever the breeze takes them.

Besides being unsightly, stray plastic bags can cause environmental damage. When they do break down, small bits of plastic can contaminate soil and water. Animals become entangled in them or mistake them for food, which can cause starvation or poisoning.

Plastic waste blowing throughout Illinois is especially disconcerting because the Mississippi River can carry it directly to the Gulf of Mexico. According to the Blue Ocean Society for Marine Conservation, bags that make it to the ocean can last up to 20 years, even in the salty water.

Concern over local rivers and an estuary led the Council of the District of Columbia to impose a 5-cents-per-bag tax on disposable bags. That plan, which went into effect in January, has seen success in cutting the number of bags used and raising money for river cleanup. It should be looked to as a model for other city and state governments seeking to encourage citizens to cut back on their plastic bag use.

The Anacostia River, which flows through D.C. and joins the Potomac to empty into Chesapeake Bay, faces serious pollution problems. So-called trash islands have formed in what has been dubbed the “forgotten river” by observers of the pollution.

So D.C. council members started to look for ways to reduce the garbage. Charles Allen, chief of staff for Democratic council member Tommy Wells, says bags made up almost half the litter in the tributaries and a quarter of it in the main river. So Wells, along with Democratic council member Mary Cheh, proposed a 5-cent tax on plastic bags.

The idea is to make people consider plastic bags as a choice, instead of just a given that comes with every purchase.

"How do we have consumers make a choice: 'Do I need that bag or not?' ... Putting a pretty small fee on that bag gets into the consumer's head and makes them make a choice," Allen says.

The tax also keeps cashiers from automatically handing out bags that are not necessary, such as for a child's junk food fix at the local convenience store. "That kid is going to take that bag of chips outside, and as soon as they cross that threshold, they are eating the chips and they are drinking that Coke. ... What was the useful life of that bag? Fifteen seconds as they went from the register to the front door," Allen says.

D.C. lawmakers worked with local businesses on the law, and that is when they were informed of something that has become a point of debate that snared an Oakland, Calif., ban into a legal battle. If customers have to pay more or can't get plastic bags, they may just switch to paper. Paper bags cost more and can take more energy to produce. So in the end, they may not be a more environmentally friendly choice, and the plan may not encourage people to choose a reusable option. Also, the businesses' overhead would go up if the majority of customers switch to paper, which would likely result in increased product prices.

"The intent here was to reduce trash, not increase the cost for people," Allen says. So D.C. officials decided to tax paper bags as well. There are exemptions for some things such as carryout food from restaurants. The statewide ban being mulled in California also would include a 5-cent tax on paper bags.

The money raised in D.C., \$150,000 in January according to the *Washington Post*, goes toward cleaning up the river and providing reusable bags for low-income and senior residents. Allen says that many bags are donated for those who cannot afford them, and stores held promotional events giving away thousands of free bags when the law first took effect.

Allen points to that fact to rebut claims that the tax is regressive. He says soup kitchens and social service providers that serve the poor testified in

Brushing over the proposed bag tax without even considering the benefits was a missed opportunity for Illinois.

favor of the idea. He adds that the plan, unlike bans or much higher bag taxes, allows consumers to decide. "Unlike taxes and death, you actually have a choice here. You don't ever have to pay the 5-cent fee. You just bring a reusable bag."

It would seem that is what many D.C. residents are doing. Allen says every major retail outlet his office has surveyed is noting at least a 50 percent reduction in consumption of disposable bags. While some estimate the total reduction in the district as high as 80 percent, Allen says the council is calculating it at 60 percent for now but is working with independent groups to get some solid numbers. He adds that anecdotal evidence from yearly spring river cleanups is encouraging. "It reduces the amount of trash that is flowing in the Anacostia. It ultimately reduces the amount of trash that ends up in Chesapeake Bay."

Brushing over the proposed bag tax without even considering the benefits was a missed opportunity for Illinois. Quinn, with his environmental record, perhaps could have done more to highlight the nonmonetary benefits of the tax.

Taxes and bans on this ubiquitous environmental hazard are clearly going to be a thing of the future. Lawmakers already consider increases in cigarette taxes as a way to curb smoking, especially among children. While effective, that is a regressive tax. A bag tax doesn't have to be. Illinois has a chance to be an innovator and craft a well-thought-out plan, such as D.C. did, with input from interested parties, including businesses and social service providers that serve seniors and low-income residents.

Illinois can learn two key things from D.C. Any tax must include paper bags to effectively encourage citizens to choose reusable bags. And the tax must be low.

Enough to make people stop and think about their actions but not so much that it causes widespread resentment or undue hardship. Seattle residents shot down a 20-cents-a-bag tax last summer.

The estimate for \$100 million in possible revenue from an Illinois tax may be a bit steep, and the hope is that it actually would decrease each year as people stop using bags. It may be best if the money went to an environmental project, as it does in D.C. for the river cleanup, but that is a lot to ask of legislators with Illinois' current budget situation. Besides, the concept is not really revenue-focused. That nickel buys five seconds in which people will slow down and make a choice about something that many consumers do not even consider now.

I have to admit. I am no saint when it comes to the grocery aisle. I have reusable bags that often don't make it to the store. My guess is a lot of people do. Sometimes I am just too tired at the end of the day to care, and I robotically take the plastic bags without a second thought. I can't imagine that most mothers shopping with three kids have plastic bags on their minds.

But a small fee on bags would likely be the push a lot of us need to make that extra effort and bring reusable bags with us. If we get into the habit, putting the reusable bags in the car will become automatic.

And for those who haven't considered the paper, plastic or reusable issue at all, a small tax might get them thinking. Some may resent being pushed to a choice, but with a tax and not a ban, they would still have one. Legislators should also implement a statewide program, such as one first proposed in 2007, so those who choose disposable bags could return them to the store for recycling.

Hopefully, any resentment would be bested by a sense of community and a realization that this is a very small, relatively painless thing we can do to make our state a better place and make us better neighbors to states that share our water supply. Even if it only serves to cut down on the number of plastic bags we see blowing across the field or stuck to a tree or a fence along the freeway, it would be a nice improvement for everyone. □

BRIEFLY

Photograph by Staff Sgt. Cassidy Snyder, courtesy of the Illinois National Guard



Sgt. Steve Sunzeri, Chief Warrant Officer Nathaniel McKean, Chief Warrant Officer Shamu Farrell, Sgt. 1st Class Michael Simard and Sgt. Jasou Jenkius, Decatur-based members of the 106th Aviation Battalion, traveled to Hammond, La., to support Operation Deep Horizon.

Illinois soldiers join oil spill cleanup effort

A group of Illinois servicemen traveled to Louisiana to help combat the oil spill that is causing massive economic and environmental damage to the Gulf Coast.

A blowout, or uncontrolled gusher of oil or natural gas, caused an explosion on BP's Deepwater Horizon offshore oil-drilling platform in April that killed 11 workers and injured 17. As of press time, the well continued to gush oil and gas.

Scientists have only begun to speculate about the long-term toll the spill will have on the region, but the immediate impact is evident. Fishermen who make their money on the waters are confined to the land. Oil is washing up on beaches and into delicate wetland ecosystems. Birds and sea creatures are covered in the dark, mucky substance, which is killing many of them.

Members of the 106th Aviation Battalion of the Illinois National Guard, based in Peoria with a flight company at Chicago Midway and a flight company in Decatur, were in Louisiana to try to mitigate some of the harm. Five members of

the unit traveled to the state in May along with a UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter.

They assisted with construction of a Tiger Dam, a temporary levee made with interlocking water-filled tubes. Tiger Dams are often used to combat flooding. The Guard's efforts aim to keep oil out of the marshlands and estuaries of an area where the Mississippi River enters the Gulf, known as the Southwest Pass.

"That pass is crucial to the seafood industry and shipping industry, as well as home and nesting grounds to a vast variety of wildlife," says Lt. Col. Randy Sikowski, battalion commander.

Members of the 106th helped the Louisiana National Guards' 244th Aviation Battalion fly equipment and engineers to the construction site. In addition to dam materials, they transported 2,000-pound sandbags loaded in slings under the helicopter and flew mission commanders over the spill to assess what needed to be done.

"There's some long flight days, and they hope their efforts will help provide

some relief to not only the Louisiana guys that are working but some relief to the environment," says Sikowski.

Illinois National Guard members helped out after hurricanes Katrina, Rita and Gustav. That experience and past connections led the Louisiana National Guard to call upon Illinois again. Sikowski says he has a long list of volunteers who want to fight the spill. In early June, four soldiers relieved the five guardsmen who went south in May.

"We want to minimize the impact on family life as much as possible," Sikowski says. He adds that the original plan was to help out for a month, but since then, the plan has become "open-ended."

While the spill is a tragic event, it reunited some friends and wartime comrades. The Illinois 106th fought alongside the Louisiana 244th in Iraq in 2004 and 2005. Sikowski says there are bonds between the two battalions. "From working the hurricanes and working the war fight, we have some good relations with those guys."

Jamey Dunn

Budget leaves blanks

Lawmakers passed a state budget with few specifics on spending and even fewer new revenue sources. They instead granted Gov. Pat Quinn sweeping power to cut where he sees fit.

The “Emergency Budget Act” would allow Quinn to borrow money from special funds and use it for general spending. The bill would also extend the time the state has to pay any overdue fiscal year 2010 bills from August 31, 2010, to December 31, 2010.

The legislation contains some cuts, such as eliminating cost-of-living increases for legislators, state’s attorneys, constitutional officers, some state agency employees and members of boards and commissions for FY 2011. It would reduce the per diem payments legislators receive on session days from \$139 to \$111 and reimbursement for car travel from 50 cents a mile to 39 cents. It would also require lawmakers, constitutional officers and executive agency directors to take 12 furlough days.

The budget would cut 5 percent from state agency operating costs. The spending portion would dole out lump sums, leaving Quinn to decide where the money goes.

State agencies would have to review contracts for opportunities to renegotiate, terminate or rebid. House Democrats estimate that could save \$300 million.

One way legislators plan to bring in money is by creating an independent state agency called the Railsplitter Tobacco Authority. The state would transfer its future payments from a national tobacco settlement to the agency, which would issue \$1.7 billion in bonding, with the settlement money pledged to pay off the borrowing.

A “tax amnesty” period would bring in an estimated \$250 million. Anyone owing past due taxes between 2002 and 2009 could pay them from October to November 2010 without penalties or interest. Anyone who doesn’t pay up during the tax amnesty period would be charged double the penalties. State agencies would also be allowed to enter into deferred payment agreements, settle debts at no less than 80 percent of the amount due and use private debt collection agencies.

Meanwhile, the legislature went home before the May 31 constitutional adjournment deadline without approving a proposed \$4 billion pension borrowing plan.

Republicans say they had been cut almost entirely out of the budgeting process. They faulted Democrats for avoiding substantial cuts and for pushing for a budget that would rely heavily on borrowing or delaying payment of the state’s bills.

“It’s the same old thing. We’re just continuing to look at a budget as an instrument of debt rather than a balanced instrument that’s supposed to have real revenue for the expenses,”

says Rep. Roger Eddy, a Hutsonville Republican.

Chicago Democratic Sen. Donne Trotter, chair of a Senate appropriations committee, says that an income tax increase, similar to the 2-percentage-point increase the Senate passed last session, is needed to help balance the budget. He says that House members have a “lack of will” to do what is needed to solve the state’s budget crisis.

“They know what the issue is, and they just haven’t acted on it. They haven’t acted on it in two years. So we are seeing, at least from my point of view, two years of dereliction on both parties in the House.”

James Dunn

For updated news see the *Illinois Issues* website at
<http://illinoisissues.uis.edu>

LEGISLATIVE CHECKLIST

Amid a last-minute flurry of budget bills, the Illinois General Assembly worked to hammer out measures meant to spur job creation and protect the environment and the public. Meanwhile, Gov. Pat Quinn weighed in on a number of measures passed earlier in the session. Here’s a sampling of what did, and didn’t, make it through the regular spring session:



Cleaning chemicals

House Bill 6115 Dry cleaners could no longer install machines that use the chemical perchloroethylene, or PERC, under a measure stalled in the House. The solvent was cited last year for contaminating a backup well being used illegally to supply drinking water to residents of Crestwood. The measure was sponsored by former Rep. Julie Hamos, a Wilmette Democrat. No senators had signed on to sponsor the legislation as of press time.

House Resolution 1174 The state would create a task force to study how to phase out PERC from dry cleaning methods, under a resolution adopted by the House. The measure is sponsored by Rep. Deborah Mell, a Chicago Democrat.



STAR bonds

Senate Bill 2093 The city of Marion could host a destination development built with the help of state tax incentives, under a bill approved by the General Assembly. The “sales tax and revenue” bonds, also known as STAR bonds, would allow investors to receive a portion of new tax revenues created by the project. The measure is sponsored by Rep. John Bradley, a Marion Democrat, and Sen. Gary Forby, a Benton Democrat.



SB 2881 Developers could use STAR bonds for projects in Marion and Mount Vernon, under a measure sponsored by Sen. John Jones, a Mount Vernon Republican. Mount Vernon was the only nearby city to oppose **SB 2093** and did so because it was not included in the area where STAR bonds could be used.



Energy performance

SB 3429 The state will study the energy efficiency of state-owned buildings, under a new law signed this spring by Gov. Pat Quinn. The measure was sponsored by Sen. Michael Bond, a Grayslake Democrat, and Rep. Jay Hoffman, a Collinsville Democrat.



Minors' names

HB 5879 Utility companies couldn't open an account in the name of anyone under the age of 18, under a measure that stalled in the General Assembly. The bill's sponsors are Rep. Robert Flider, a Mount Zion Democrat, and Sen. Martin Sandoval, a Chicago Democrat.



Pet store disclosure

HB 5772 Pet stores and animal shelters would be required to provide to potential pet owners the details of cats' and dogs' histories, if Gov. Pat Quinn signs legislation approved by both the House and the Senate. Democrats Sen. Jeffrey Schoenberg of Evanston and Rep. Susana Mendoza of Chicago sponsored the measure.



Free rides

HB 4623 Not all seniors would get free mass transit rides, under a measure approved by the Senate. Only those who meet income eligibility requirements would have access to free rides. The bill, sponsored by Palatine Republican Rep. Suzanne Bassi and Chicago Democratic Sen. Rickey Hendon, is a compromise that would raise the income limits from what was proposed earlier this year in the unsuccessful **HB 4654**.



Payday loans

HB 537 Businesses offering payday loans would be limited in the amount of interest they could charge, under a measure approved by the General Assembly. Among other reforms, borrowers would also be barred from taking out loans requiring payments in excess of 22.5 percent of their monthly income. The measure was sponsored by Skokie Democratic Rep. Lou Lang and Maywood Democratic Sen. Kimberly Lightford.



Polling places

SB 3012 State universities in 2010 would host grace-period voter registration and early voting on campus as part of a pilot project, under a measure approved by the legislature and sponsored by Sen. Terry Link, a Waukegan Democrat, and Rep. Elaine Nekritz, a Northbrook Democrat.



McPier reforms

SB 28 Exhibitors using facilities run by the Metropolitan Pier and Exposition Authority (McPier) could see decreased costs as a result of changes to convention rules that allow them to use services not provided by in-house union labor. Gov. Pat Quinn issued an amendatory veto on the measure, saying he objected to vague language concerning procurement, a tax on cab rides at Chicago airports and the legislative appointment of a specific trustee, Jim Reilly, to oversee McPier operations. The General Assembly overrode Quinn's changes. The measure is sponsored by Senate President John Cullerton and House Speaker Michael Madigan, both Chicago Democrats.

SB 3215 The legislature could remove the McPier trustee by joint resolution, and the governor could appoint his successor, under a trailer bill meant to ease some of Gov. Pat Quinn's concerns about **SB 28**. Quinn signed the measure, which also strengthens procurement code language. Senate President John Cullerton and House Speaker Michael Madigan, both Chicago Democrats, sponsored the measure.



Video gambling

HB 4927 Truck stops could host video gambling machines, under a measure approved by the General Assembly. Bars and restaurants associated with off-track betting facilities could also hold the machines, so long as the owner of the OTB facility does not own the video gambling machines. The measure is sponsored by Rep. Lou Lang, a Skokie Democrat, and Sen. Terry Link, a Waukegan Democrat.



Local pensions

HB 5873 Local police and firefighters wouldn't be able to retire with full pension benefits until they are 55 years old, up from the current 50, under a measure sponsored by Waukegan Democratic Sen. Terry Link and Mt. Zion Democratic Rep. Robert Flider.

Rachel Wells

Study: Extension should stand alone

A University of Illinois report recommends that the school's Extension program — which seeks to make research conducted at the university system useful on a practical level for the general public — become a freestanding entity in the college and go it alone when seeking state funds.

The U of I Extension is based in the College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences at the Urbana campus. An internal budget review suggests that might be holding the Extension back. "The reach of U of I Extension across campus is limited by the perception that it is all about agriculture, a perception that is reinforced by the fact that campus funding for U of I Extension is spent or directed exclusively within [the college of agriculture]," the report said.

Though it is perhaps best-known for youth 4-H agriculture programs, which have 260,000 participants statewide, the Extension offers education in five areas of study: healthy society; food security and safety; environmental stewardship; sustainable and profitable food production and marketing systems; and enhancing youth, family and community well-being.

The report stated: "One potential benefit of this arrangement is that U of I Extension could be clearly supported and tasked by the legislature. A potential risk is that U of I Extension funding, expressed as a separate item with a fairly large dollar amount attached to it, could become a target for legislators seeking to cut state spending."

Robert Hoeft, interim associate dean of Extension and outreach, says, "In the past, we've tried to do anything everybody wanted. And we've just got ourselves spread so thin. So now we are going to really target our programs to high-impact areas. So the things that are nice but don't really make an impact on the state of Illinois — we're going to eliminate those things."

The Extension announced in April a plan to consolidate its 76 administrative units down to 30, each serving between three and five counties.

Jamey Dunn

Scientist connects corn and climate change

Photographs courtesy of Northern Illinois University



Northern Illinois University Professor David Changnon discusses his research with WGN meteorologist Tom Skilling, who recently visited campus to film a segment on Changnon's findings.

The corn that is so closely associated with vast stretches of Illinois may be contributing to changes in the state's climate.

When the cooling plant at Northern Illinois University was struggling to do its job during the particularly humid summer of 1999, Michael Saari, director of the plant, sought out David Changnon, a climatologist at the school. The cooling system works by removing moisture from the air, and Saari wanted to know if Illinois summers were becoming more humid.

So Changnon, with the help of graduate student researchers Jesse Sparks and Jason Starke, looked back at readings of temperature and dew point, the temperature at which condensation begins, from the 1950s through the 2000s. They found that the late summer months were getting cooler in Illinois.

In Chicago, the number of 90-degree-or-warmer days in the 1930s was 344, but from 2000 to 2009, the mercury only broke 90 degrees for 172 days. However, rising dew points meant those slightly cooler days were much more humid. This humidity is a problem for cooling systems such as the one at NIU, as well as the sweat evaporation system humans use to regulate body temperature.

Changnon's theory, backed by more than 10 years of research, is that human agricultural endeavors are the primary cause of the shift. Technological progress and changes in farming practices have led to more corn growing in the state. Where farmers once had pastures to raise livestock, there is often a crop growing today. "What we've seen in a lot of counties is that there's been incentives put out by the federal government to grow corn and soybeans," he says.

Farmers are also planting crops more densely. The space between rows averaged 40 inches in the 1950s but averages only 30 today. About 18,000 seeds would go into an average field then, and now it is about 30,000 seeds. In July and August, all that corn sweats moisture into the air. The moisture becomes clouds and precipitation, making for cooler, wetter days, which are actually better growing conditions for the corn.



Jesse Sparks (left) and Jason Starke, meteorology graduate students at NIU, monitor air temperatures and humidity at a weather station in a DeKalb cornfield.

The results can also have negative consequences. Increased rainfall can cause flash floods. Humidity trapped under high pressure atmospheric conditions can lead to deadly heat waves, such as the ones that struck Chicago in the mid-1990s.

Changnon says he is not trying to disparage agriculture in Illinois. "Our agricultural system is running in such a beautiful way. ... What agriculture has done is just phenomenal."

He just hopes the results will make people see that their actions directly affect the local climate, with both positive and negative results. "Even minor changes of what we do on the surface lead to climate change." He also hopes that studies such as this will help people understand how their local conditions fit into global climate change. "Globally speaking, we're warming. But as the globe warms, there are going to be certain areas, for reasons that we don't fully understand, that don't warm as much or as quickly."

NIU took the findings of the study into account when buying its new cooling system, which goes online this summer.

Jamey Dunn



Sunrise on Lake Michigan at Evanston

Wind farm on Lake Michigan? Evanston considers it

The city of Evanston for the past few months has sought information from developers who might be interested in creating a wind farm on Lake Michigan.

The issue arose out of a grassroots effort to reduce the city's greenhouse gas emissions, says Nathan Kipnis, an Evanston architect who is co-chair of the city's renewable energy task force.

"It's the best way to reduce our carbon footprint that we know of, and we're committed to reducing our carbon footprint," says Evanston Mayor Elizabeth Tisdahl.

Evanston had a goal of reducing its carbon footprint by 13 percent, or 130,000 metric tons, by 2012. A wind farm seven miles offshore would abate 450,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide, Kipnis says. A \$400,000 wind farm with 40 turbines — a cost that a developer would bear — would produce enough power for about 40,000 homes. Evanston has 30,000 homes. He estimates it would take seven years to develop a farm.

Kipnis notes that winds are strong and the lake shallow — between 70 and 80

feet deep — at the location his group has proposed. He says that the wind farm's proposed location near Northwestern University would be at the greatest stretch of nonresidential lakefront from Waukegan to the southeast side of Chicago.

As of press time, no one had made a formal inquiry, but the mayor says one developer had visited her twice. The deadline for developers to offer information was June 30.

Carolyn Collopy, sustainable programs coordinator for Evanston, says the issuance of a request for information, as the city did in April, is "really looking to see if there's interest out there, if it's a legitimate idea. So by getting responses, depending on what the caliber and quality of those responses is, we'll know if this idea is one we should take a more serious look at. ... We'd like to find out what developers would propose in terms of a business structure, who would pay for it. ... All these things we're hoping to get a better sense of, so we can take it to council and see if they want to take the next step."

The council unanimously approved the request for information, but questions remain for some council members, such as whether construction should occur on Lake Michigan and the fact that the state — not Evanston — has property rights to the lake.

"The questions are significant questions. They are about policy, where we're heading in the future," says Ald. Judy Fiske. "And then the bigger overarching question to me ... is we have a treasure here. The Great Lakes provide a very large percentage of the world's fresh water, and it is our responsibility to be stewards of the lake. I want to be sure development on the lake comes only as a last resort."

But the mayor downplays the question of aesthetics. "Sunset on the lake and the horizon and all of that is beautiful, and it will still be beautiful. There will be gorgeous sunrises and a gorgeous lake. Even with wind turbines, it will still be a spectacular Lake Michigan."

Maureen Foertsch McKinney

Methane produces power as well as smell

An infamously smelly gas created in landfills is also being used to generate electricity all over Illinois.

Human activities account for half of the methane that is emitted in the atmosphere each year, and landfills are the second largest human-related source of the gas, behind agriculture. Methane emissions from landfills made up 23 percent of the total emissions in 2007, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Methane, a highly flammable greenhouse gas, is created in landfills when organic waste rots in the low-oxygen environment. The byproduct, known as landfill gas, is made up of equal parts methane and carbon dioxide, with trace amounts of other organic materials.

Because methane is so combustible, landfills are required to collect the gas and burn it off in flares for health and safety reasons. It has the potential to seep underground, sometimes causing explosions in basements, although Tom Hubbard, an engineer for the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency, says that has not happened recently in Illinois.

However, methane from landfills can also be harnessed for many uses, including the generation of electricity, heating greenhouses and providing natural gas to consumers. According to the EPA, there are 33 operational projects in Illinois that repurpose landfill gas.

"You are burning it either way, but you are not getting any useful work out of it if you are just using the flare," Hubbard says.

To create power from landfill gas, a vacuum system collects it from the garbage. It is filtered and then used to power electricity-generating engines or turbines.

Repurposing methane from landfills has many benefits, including reduction in greenhouse gases, local pollution, explosion risks and landfill odors. The EPA considers the capture of landfill gas one of the only renewable fuel sources that when used, actually pre-empts pollution from going into the atmosphere. In 2007, landfill gas energy projects harnessed greenhouse gas emissions that equaled the output of 14 million passenger vehicles.

Bill Plunkett, a spokesman for Waste Management, says his company is "looking at waste management as resource man-

agement." The Texas-based waste and environmental services corporation has 11 gas-to-energy facilities throughout Illinois and plans to break ground on another in September.

Plunkett says consumer demand is driving companies such as his to be more "green." "Customers are more and more interested in sustainability and in environmental conservation opportunities."

Landfills can continue to produce power for years after they have stopped taking in trash. Two of Waste Management's landfills, in suburban Geneva and Northbrook, still produce electricity, even though they are no longer operational and have been converted into golf courses. "These landfills can produce methane for decades," Hubbard says.

Both the Illinois and U.S. EPA encourage landfills to harness methane instead of burning it off. While it is a practical solution to a potentially stinky and explosive problem, Hubbard says its capabilities as a power source should not be overestimated.

"It's viable, but it's not going to solve our energy problems. Even if you did it at every landfill you could, it would only make up about one-tenth of our energy needs."

James Dunn



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BRIEFLY

State expands solar

Illinois took an Icarian leap to the future in May with the General Assembly's passage of two bills aimed at expanding solar energy. Directed toward providers, **House Bill 6202**, the Solar Ramp Up, sets annual targets for the amount of solar power to be used in Illinois between 2012 and 2015. Directed toward users, **House Bill 5429**, the Homeowners' Solar Rights Act, clarifies the rights of members of homeowner or condominium associations to put up solar panels and outlines a process to do it.

"**HB 6202** sets a minimum amount of our electricity that not only has to come from renewable sources but specifically solar sources," says Mark Burger, president of the Illinois Solar Energy Association. "This will facilitate a market for a large-scale development, and if done on a large enough basis,

solar energy will be able to compete with other sources of peak power generation."

In 2007, Illinois passed a renewable energy standard that requires 25 percent of the state's electricity to be generated from renewable sources by 2025. The law requires that at least 6 percent of the state's renewable energy come from solar power by 2015, but it doesn't provide a path for Illinois utilities to meet that goal.

"The bill was designed simply to create a staircase to the solar requirement of the renewable standard to start in 2015," says Assistant Senate Majority Leader Don Harmon. The Oak Park Democrat was the chief sponsor in the Illinois Senate. "There was some anxiety in the environmental community that springing that requirement of 6 percent might be more than the market

could bear, especially if we wanted to generate most of that in Illinois."

Harmon says the state's power generators recognize that the legislation makes it easier for them to comply with the renewable standard "if we started with a spoonful, rather than turn on the fire hose."

Burger says Illinois businesses are being hurt because other Midwestern states, such as Missouri and Wisconsin, have already passed legislation encouraging the growth of their solar industries, and their companies are finding customers in Illinois.

HB 5429, he says, is aimed at some of those customers. The measure addresses small-scale solar, designed for buildings 30 feet or shorter. "It's not a huge market, but it's an important market segment," says Burger. The majority of new construction occurs in those types of

Photograph courtesy of Exelon



Construction workers and companies helped erect the state's largest solar collector, located in the West Pullman neighborhood of Chicago.

developments, and, he says, people who want to install a solar energy system, either electric or thermal, have been “frozen out.” The legislation requires associations to come up with reasonable standards. “They can no longer say, ‘You can’t do it because we don’t like it.’”

State Rep. Sara Feigenholtz, a Chicago Democrat who sponsored the Homeowners’ Solar Rights Act in the Illinois House, says the measure is about disclosure. “For people in the housing market who are an energy-efficient family and want to consider nontraditional energy sources before they purchase, they can know what choices their homeowners’ association allows. It’s a step in the right direction.”

Burger says both pieces of legislation are important to the state, but **HB 6202** sets a benchmark that markets can rely on so there is some continuity for businesses to develop projects on a cost-effective basis. In mature solar markets

such as Germany, Japan and California, not only have the technology problems been solved faster, but the costs have been reduced “because businesses can operate on a sustained basis, not a one-shot deal.”

Exelon, the Chicago-based electric utility, has taken a major step toward meeting the state’s renewable energy benchmarks by building the largest urban solar-generating plant in the United States. Placed on a former polluted industrial site in West Pullman, the 10-megawatt \$62 million solar plant returned 41 acres to the taxpayer rolls. Exelon has applied for \$49 million in loan guarantees from the federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act program, but so far, its request has not been granted.

The project provided jobs for 200 construction workers, who installed 32,292 solar photovoltaic panels onto more than 7,300 steel piers manufactured a mile

away at Fabricating & Welding Corp., a family-owned, third-generation company. The solar plant began generating some electricity in January. In July, the company plans to open a visitor center to serve groups, such as students on field trips or community clubs, who are interested in the innovative technology.

“We consider this a demonstration project,” says Paul Elsberg, media relations manager for Exelon. “Part of our purpose is to see what happens as we move through the seasons, to see how much electricity it generates and how it does financially.”

Elsberg says the company’s engineers estimate the solar plant displaces more than 30 million pounds of carbon that would have resulted from generating the same amount of power from fossil fuels, such as in coal plants.

“That’s the equivalent of taking more than 2,500 cars off the road.”

Beverley Scobell

Lawmakers consider ban on BPA

Illinois lawmakers are considering banning a controversial chemical from children’s products.

Bisphenol A, commonly referred to as BPA, is a chemical used in plastics and resins. Because it is exceptionally tough, versatile and chemically resistant, it is used in a wide variety of products, such as DVDs, automobile components, electronics and appliances. It is also used in such food containers as water bottles and as lining on the inside of metal cans.

Many in the scientific, health and public safety communities have raised concern about the use of BPA, especially in food-related products, because studies have linked the chemical to cancer, obesity, diabetes and behavioral issues such as attention deficit disorder. The idea that BPA is harmful to humans and the levels at which people can safely ingest it have become hotly debated points of contention and the subject of much study and media focus.

In May 2009, Chicago became the first city in the country to ban BPA in children’s bottles and cups. Major

retailers and manufacturers, including Wal-Mart and Toys R Us, are phasing such products out of their inventories as public concern has heightened. Minnesota passed a ban similar to Chicago’s earlier that same month. Many other states and communities are taking up the issue.

Senate Bill 3750 would ban BPA from baby bottles, children’s sippy cups and baby food and infant formula containers.

The U.S. Food and Drug Association is encouraging people, especially those with children, to try to limit exposure to BPA. However, it is not calling for parents to stop using infant formula. According to its website, the “FDA is not recommending that families change the use of infant formula or foods, as the benefit of a stable source of good nutrition outweighs the potential risk from BPA exposure.”

Max Muller, program director for Environment Illinois, says it should be the chemical industry’s responsibility to determine whether BPA is harmful, instead of leaving that duty to government agencies funded by tax dollars. “The burden of proof is totally messed up. It should be on producers. They

should bear the cost of proving their product is safe.”

Opponents of the ban say that the federal government should regulate BPA if necessary, instead of states piecing together a patchwork of bans and restrictions. “People make products for the whole country, not just Illinois,” says Mark Biel, executive director of the Chemical Industry Council of Illinois.

Biel calls BPA the “gold standard of food safety” because it so effectively protects foods from degradation and contamination that can lead to illness such as botulism. “If you’re going to switch to another product, you had better make sure it works well because if somebody gets sick or some child dies, it will be the responsibility of those that forced the change.”

Park Ridge Democratic Sen. Dan Kotowski, the sponsor of the bill, predicts that change will come soon and would like to see the industry on board. “The reality of this question is whether they want to do it today or tomorrow or five years from now. ... We can’t wait for Washington on this. This is not about Washington any more. This is about Illinois.”

Jamey Dunn



From left: former Govs. Bob Taft of Ohio, Parris Glendening of Maryland, Jim Edgar of Illinois and Madeleine Kunin of Vermont. The appearance of the governors kicked off a national political science conference in June hosted by the University of Illinois Springfield.

Conference draws political scientists

Political scientists studying state governments across the country gathered at the University of Illinois Springfield to attend expert panels, talk shop, compare notes and consider the ways that academic research can contribute to and shape public policy.

The university hosted the 10th annual State Politics and Policy Conference in June.

About 200 attended the three-day conference. Panel topics included public opinion, voter and legislator behavior, federalism, race and ethnicity, governors' influence over the legislative process and a Statehouse media perspective on political science.

Scholars presented cutting-edge, often yet-to-be-published work. Barbara Ferrara, associate director of the Center for State Policy and Leadership at UIS and co-chair of the conference, says it is one of the most important aspects of the event.

"They are bringing their research at a prepublication stage and collecting feedback on it and refining it before publication," she says.

Christopher Mooney, co-chair of the conference and a political scientist with the University of Illinois-based Institute of Government and Public Affairs, says the event, along with the publication he founded 10 years ago, *State Politics and Policy Quarterly*, helps to solidify the community of scholars who study state policy and politics and gives more visibility to the pursuit. "With [State Politics and Policy Quarterly], and with the conferences, our subfield has become one of the most vibrant in the country."

He adds that public policy at the state level directly affects citizens' everyday lives, yet it is often overlooked by analysts.

"I really value the study of state politics and policy. ... I think that this is a level of government that is extremely important to us. It's way underreported by journalists, and it's way under-studied by scientists."

The conference kicked off with a panel of past governors: former Gov. Jim Edgar, a Republican who was governor of Illinois from 1991 to 1999; former Gov. Madeleine Kunin, a Democrat who served in Vermont from 1985 to 1991; former Gov. Parris Glendening, a Democrat who served in Maryland from 1995-2003; and former Gov. Bob Taft, a Republican who served in Ohio from 1999-2007.

Edgar says states that are facing big challenges, such as Illinois' large budget deficit, could use input from political scientists. "States today face a whole bunch of problems. I don't know of a more challenging time in state government ... and public officials don't have all the answers. One of the things that I have found in my 30 years in government, we have very few of the answers. We need help from people outside. And the academic community has much to contribute."

Kunin says educators need to help students understand the political process and what it means to be an engaged member of their communities. "You cannot abstain from the responsibility of citizenship. I believe that we have, probably more than ever, the responsibility to teach students about citizenship and that politics does enter into that."

Ferrara and Mooney agree that hosting the conference will reinforce UIS' reputation as a top school for the study of public affairs and will help to recruit future students and faculty.

Jamey Dunn

Advocates argue for locally grown food

This spring, as lawmakers rushed through the Capitol, about 100 advocates for local foods greeted them with tomato plants, a gesture of gratitude for approving bills they pushed.

Vocalizing the demand for local foods is the only way the distribution system will see improvements, says Wes King, policy coordinator for the Illinois Stewardship Alliance.

"With local foods, you vote with your fork," King says. "Making those decisions to ask whatever restaurant you go to all the time or the stores you frequent, it starts with asking: 'Hey, do you have anything locally grown? Why don't you?'"

The same is true for elected officials, King says. The appreciation his group demonstrated this spring was for lawmakers' approval of resolutions urging the development of an online registry of organic and specialty crop farms and creating a task force for determining what can and can't be sold at farmers' markets.

Lawmakers also approved deregulation of small-scale honey production

through **Senate Bill 2959**; the establishment of a farm-to-school electronic database for linking schools directly to local growers through **SB 615**; and the creation of a fund for bringing LINK card technology to farmers' markets through **House Bill 4756**.

HB 4756, the Farmers' Market Technology Improvement Program Act, will help eliminate food deserts and bridge a gap between rich and poor in terms of fresh food availability, says the measure's sponsor, Chicago Democratic Rep. La Shawn Ford.

"One of the things people that are not on a LINK card ... they probably have cars and are able to travel to grocery stores," Ford says. "People with LINK cards are confined to their neighborhoods. Hopefully, this will allow and encourage local farmers' markets to come into the inner cities more where people need it most."

King hopes the measure will help educate less affluent populations about the benefits of local foods.

"Definitely, there's been a huge change in attitude and awareness of the

issue," he says. But many still think fresh, local food is "something that's only for white, rich urbanites, and they don't make the connection that supporting it is for communities as a whole."

Entire communities can benefit from a locally based food distribution system because it keeps dollars nearby, he says.

"Why raise a field of corn to feed to cattle and ship it when you could grow feed locally and feed it to animals locally?" King asks.

"Ninety-five percent of all the food eaten in Illinois comes from outside Illinois, which we see as a huge loss of money to the state." That statistic should be shocking, he says, considering Illinois' reputation for fertile soil.

According to a report by the Illinois Local and Organic Food and Farm Task Force, created in 2007, Illinoisans spend \$48 billion on food every year but only \$2 billion on locally farmed food. And most of the food consumed in Illinois travels about 1,500 miles before it gets here.

Rachel Wells

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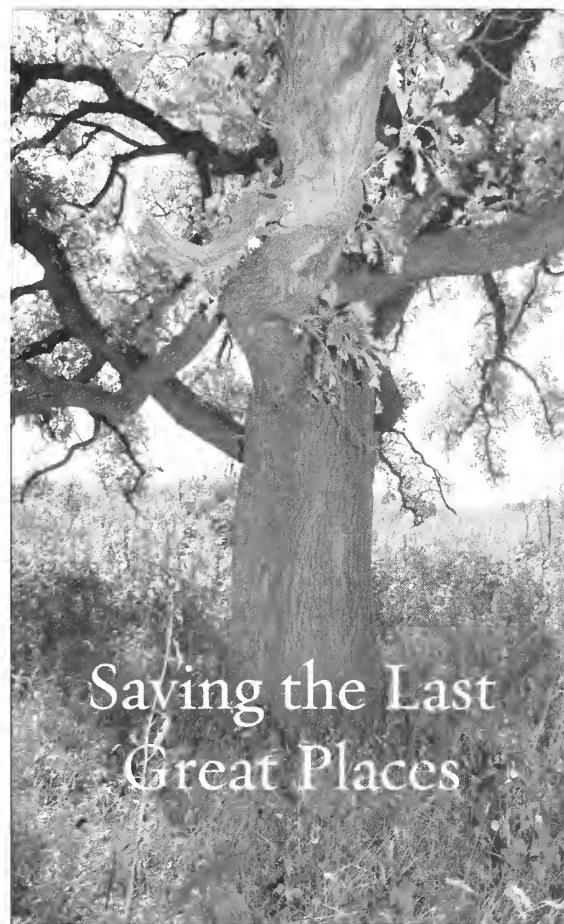
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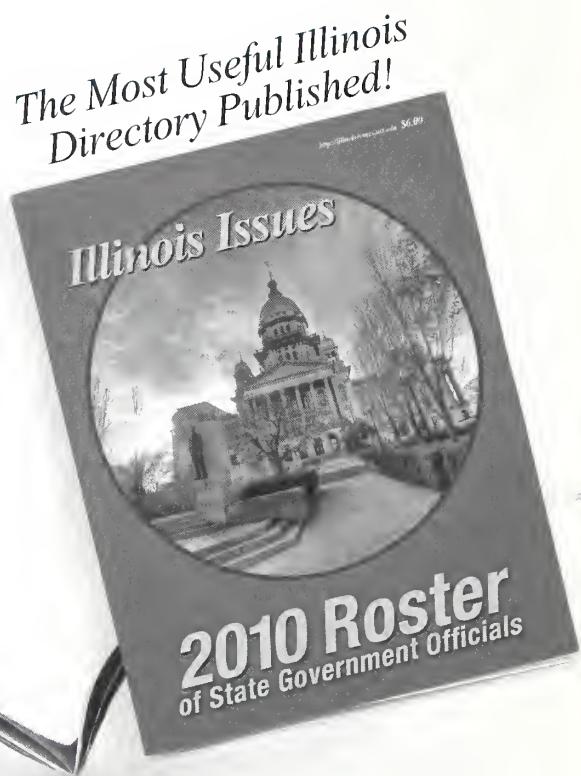
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The healing ground

photographs courtesy of The Wetlands Initiative and Renee Thakali, U.S Forest Service

Gradually, the Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie is growing into its name.

About 2,000 acres of the 19,000-acre complex has been restored to tallgrass prairie, and the wetlands and woodlands there are increasingly inviting to flora and fauna.

The evolution of the site, located about 50 miles southwest of Chicago, suits the name Midewin, which comes from the Potawatomi word for healing.

Once the home of the Joliet Army Ammunition Plant, built in 1940, the tract transferred in 1996 from the U.S. Army to the U.S. Forest Service, becoming the nation's first federally designated tallgrass prairie preserve. Since then public, private and volunteer ecologists have worked to return cropland and pasture riddled by invasive and

non-native species into the lush fields and forests that covered Illinois prior to the settlement by European-Americans in the 1800s.

Flourishing at Midewin are 348 species of plants: the ear-leaf false foxglove, coneflower, purple prairie clover, wild bergamot, big bluestem and little bluestem and Indian grasses, to name a few. Among those plants is the federally endangered leafy prairie clover (*Dalea foliosa*), which grows on the dolomite prairie at Midewin, says Renee Thakali, ecosystem restoration team leader for the forest service.

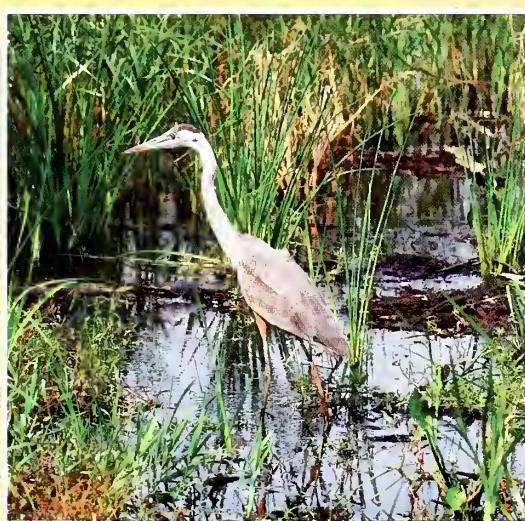
Midewin has also lured 108 species of breeding birds, such as Henslow sparrows, bobolinks, loggerhead shrikes and upland sandpipers, according to the National Audubon Society. (An additional 41 feed or winter there.) Then there

are the wild mammals, reptiles, amphibians and aquatic species, including freshwater mussels.

Midewin has the state's greatest population of upland sandpipers, an endangered species in Illinois, says Jeff Walk, director of science for The Nature Conservancy in Illinois. "There's a huge population of a bird called the bobolink, a species that's declined by more than 90 percent in Illinois over past 50 years," Walk says, noting that many thousands of the birds nest at Midewin.

"Midewin is a great opportunity for Illinois because it's such a large amount of open space so close to a major population center in Chicago," Walk says. "The really wonderful thing about Midewin? There are places where you can stand and see natural vegetation and little, if any, evidence of development." □





Use of bike trails grows

State's pathways now considered more than recreation

story and photographs by Chris Young



When Lynn Miller eases into the seat of his recumbent bike and heads down the Interurban Trail between Springfield and Chatham, he's putting a lot more than miles behind him.

That's because getting the thin ribbon of asphalt to stretch 8.71 miles between the two communities took years. Planning started back in the mid-'90s. Then it took a second heroic effort to keep the link from being severed shortly after it opened.

"Thank God it worked out the way it did," Miller says. "For a while, we thought the trail was going to be a goner."

The story of the Interurban Trail illustrates just how much effort it can take to build every single mile of recreational trail. It shows how those who are trying to improve the state's system of bicycle trails need patience and perseverance in trying to get drivers to become more accepting of bicycle traffic.

Twenty-five years ago, bike trails were considered recreational paths that went from point A to point B. But as thinking about trails evolved, they came to be seen as alternatives for transportation that could link communities together.

And that's where things get more involved, says Dick Westfall, greenways and trails section manager for the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. "Today, they are seen as much more than one-dimensional recreational facilities."

Miller says a lot goes through his mind when he rides down the Interurban Trail. He often thinks about how he and Bill Donels, a co-member of the Springfield Bicycle Club, attended dozens of meetings concerning its fate. Miller and Donels served as legislative co-chairs of the club.

"When we got to 100 meetings, I stopped counting," says Donels.

They met with fellow bicycle club members and representatives of city, state and federal governments. "But that was what we had to do to impress upon the bureaucracy that bicycling is here to stay, and we needed that trail," he says. "And we needed a solution to the impact of cutting it in half."

It would seem to be fairly easy for bicyclists and cycling issues to be left behind in our hurry-up, fast food culture.

Illinois ranks 21st in the 2010 Bicycle Friendly State Rankings, according to the League of American Bicyclists, down from No. 9 in 2009. The rankings consider efforts related to legislation, education, infrastructure and other benchmarks.

Behind any advances are bicycling advocates who have devoted countless behind-the-scenes hours.

Some work on intensely local projects, as Miller and Donels have. Others labor at the policy level, fighting to ensure that bicycling remains a transportation option — and making sure that cyclists and pedestrians don't disappear from long-range plans.

Illinois is one of 33 states to have a public safety campaign such as "Share the Road," says Ed Barsotti, executive director of the League of Illinois Bicyclists. The state also has passed a law requiring motorists to allow at least 3 feet when passing a bicyclist. Bikes are mentioned in the state driving manual, and Illinois even has a question about bicycles on its driver's license test, Barsotti says.

A big plus for Illinois is the "Complete Streets" legislation passed in 2007. Complete Streets means bicycle and pedestrian accommodations are part of new construction projects.

"If we are going to spend the money constructing or expanding a roadway, we need to make that roadway useful for people walking and biking along or across the roadway," Barsotti says. "This is an issue that is rising in importance."

That's because towns used to be laid out in a grid system of streets. Bicyclists could avoid busy thoroughfares by sticking to neighborhood routes.

"Now, subdivisions empty into arterial streets," Barsotti says. "Big box stores, restaurants and other businesses are only accessible from major roads."

With fewer route choices, it becomes more important for cyclists to be able to travel on main roads. Pedestrians need safe ways to cross, as well.

"If you are going to make an investment, [the beginning of a road construction project] is the cheaper time to make accommodations for people who are walking or biking."

The Interurban Trail has had its share of challenges, almost since the beginning.

The power utility now known as Ameren CILCO originally donated an abandoned interurban rail corridor to the state for the trail, retaining an easement for utility transmission, Westfall says.

From Springfield, the intended route traveled south before passing under Interstate 72 and continuing on to Lake Springfield and then to the village of Chatham.

"There was some private property involved that led to an eminent domain dispute with a landowner," Westfall says. "It was kind of like dueling property surveys. We ended up acquiring 1/7th of an acre that was in dispute."

While the courts sorted things out, the other two-thirds of the trail was constructed in phases.

"We never intended to construct it or operate and maintain it," Westfall says. "We looked for local partners. The Springfield Park District and Village of Chatham stepped up and divided the project in the middle."

Once complete, the Interurban Trail had been open barely half a year before cyclists learned in January 2005 that it likely would be closed again.

The new challenge came right out of the blue: the blueprints for a major road extension to connect Springfield's south-side business district with Interstate 72.

When Miller and Donels looked at the plans for the road extension, they saw the bike trail was now severed at a Norfolk & Southern railroad line near the interstate.

The existing trail crossed the railroad, but in planning for high-speed rail, the Illinois Commerce Commission was closing grade-level crossings. Instead, overpasses were being constructed to separate car and train traffic wherever possible.

But widening the bridge deck to accommodate bicycles was expensive, Westfall says, so in the new plans, the trail stopped before it got to the interstate — from either direction. Bicyclists could still travel a long, circuitous route between Chatham and Springfield, but the trail would no longer be a practical way to commute between the two communities.

The trail faced additional roadblocks where east-west streets would be built to intersect the new road in future years, creating more multilane intersections that would be difficult for families on bikes to cross. And a new commercial development — known as Legacy Pointe — was being planned for the area, so the road extension, originally designed to be four lanes, was to be widened to six.

Westfall says the lesson of the Interurban Trail is the need for partnerships that will look far beyond simply constructing a trail.

"As they became good ways for alternative transportation, and as they are now viewed as connecting communities, then this partnership approach became much more prevalent.

"And finding a way to put a trail through the landscape became much more important," he says. "We're not just putting a trail on an old railroad bed or levee and saying, 'Have fun.'"

Bicycle and walking trails can serve to shape and buffer development, Westfall says. And they can provide unbroken wildlife corridors that connect habitats.

"I think you have to be more creative and opportunistic, but I think the value of these trails is much greater," he says.

Natural Resources cannot take on a lot of new costs for infrastructure, he says. So the agency is looking for local partners to take on maintenance in perpetuity.

Communities can reap benefits from bicycling, Barsotti says, because most urban car trips are three miles or less — a reasonable distance for bike travel.

"Short [automobile] trips are disproportionate polluters," he says. "They provide a lot of opportunity to divert them to non-motorized trips that result in healthier people and cleaner air."

Bicycling to run errands, for example, is an easy way to fit moderate exercise into the daily routine.

"Bicycling provides public health benefits available to anyone well into their senior years. People who get some activity every day are generally healthier and more trim," Barsotti says.

"We see charts of obesity becoming epidemic. Public health agencies see the benefit of partnering with bike advocacy groups."

Barsotti says regular exercise on the seat of a bicycle can produce a level of fitness equivalent to someone 10 years younger and a life expectancy two years longer than average.

Across Illinois, there are plenty of opportunities to get on a bike and ride.

"I would estimate there are more than 2,000 miles of bike trail in the state," Westfall says. "But it grows every year."

"Then we have big projects like the Route 66 Trail that goes from Chicago to St. Louis that is mostly on road but is in little pieces. If you included that, you could add another 300 miles."

"Very little [of the Route 66 Trail] today is what you would call a bike trail."

But there is no free ride.

Even though bike trails are fairly small potatoes compared with big highway projects, they still cost money. And with budgets under stress, competition is fierce for dollars that might be allocated to trails.

Roughly 2.5 percent of federal transportation funds go to "enhancements" such as trails, decorative lighting, sidewalks and other amenities. Nationally, bike trails get just more than half of those enhancement dollars. But Barsotti says Illinois has lagged behind the last eight years.

"In our opinion, there have been some real problems getting all the dollars out of that source that we could," he says.

Appropriations often turn out to be more like speed limits: You can go under the limit but not over. Sometimes, fewer federal dollars are available than were approved for a project. State transportation departments may have to give back the discrepancy — a process known as rescission.

"From October 2003 to September 2009, Illinois received \$164 million for transportation enhancements," Barsotti says. "With stimulus funds, that total went up to \$192 million."

"Out of that, only 107 grant awards were announced," he says. "The remaining \$82 million was returned."

"However, of that [\$110 million that Illinois retained], there were a lot of projects like sidewalks in downtowns, for example, that are not useful to bikes," he says. In the 107 grant awards, roughly \$34 million went to the bicycle and pedestrian category.

There are other funding sources. The Illinois Department of Natural Resources has a state bike path grant program. And the state's Vehicle Title Transfer Fee generates \$3 million a year.

"It was a very reliable source," Barsotti says. But state budget problems have made specially created state funds a target of "sweeps." The Illinois General Assembly sometimes passes legislation that allows balances to be scooped out and deposited in the general fund to pay the state's bills.

In March 2008, the General Assembly approved a sweep of the fund used for bicycle trails, Barsotti says. "In 2009, the fund was not swept, but because of the state's cash flow issues, the grant awards have not been announced."

Westfall says money spent on bike trails is an infinitesimal fraction of all transportation expenditures.

"You could take all the money spent on bike trails, and you wouldn't solve the school funding problem," he says. "And you would have less opportunity in your community than you do now."

Building bike trails is complicated. Long trails cross multiple jurisdictions. Cities, counties, park districts, natural resources departments, transportation departments and politicians at all levels often are involved in trying to find common ground — even if that common ground only has to be a few feet wide.

Westfall says that creating bike trails today requires those partners to come together.



A bridge that keeps bicycle and car traffic separate carries users of the Interurban Trail over railroad tracks.

"Bike trails represent good examples of partnerships that provide multiple benefits," he says. The trails are so popular that "people are out using them before the asphalt cools."

Donels and Miller say help for the Interurban Trail came from the developer of Legacy Pointe.

Both men say Stephen Luker, a managing partner of the development, came through with a plan and donated the right-of-way to make the trail a reality.

"It's not mentioned very often — and it should be — but the developer of Legacy Pointe was very good to work with us to reach a solution."

"It would have cost a lot more to buy right of way."

The trail jogs to the west and actually goes around the development, and thus keeps bikes away from the main road. It then passes underneath the roadway via a concrete box culvert and then up a hill to its own railroad overpass built next to — but separated from — the one for cars.

Westfall says U.S. Sen. Dick Durbin's office became involved, as well, to help find a way to build the bicycle bridge over the railroad tracks.

On Memorial Day weekend, the framework of a new building stood in the middle of a large fallow field on the Legacy Pointe site. Culverts were stacked not far from the trail. Some earth-moving and drainage work is visible at the site.

"We said when [the new road] went in, the character of the Interurban would change," says Westfall. "Before, it was kind of a sleepy trail between Springfield and Chatham."

"With all the development going in the area, it was going to be passing through more of a commercially developed area. So we said, let's make it as safe and user friendly as possible."

Once past Legacy Pointe and south of Interstate 72, the trail picks up its old route.

"It makes for a pleasant ride," Donels says. "It has more trees than it did before, and people are always wanting trees."

"I think it will work out very well," he says. "Especially for bicyclists that can go all the way to Chatham without being cut off."



Development of land adjacent to the Interurban Trail will change its character over time from rural to urban.

Miller has already racked up 1,500 miles on his bike in the first half of 2010. Still, those few miles of the Interurban Trail have to be especially sweet.

"We lucked into that one." □

Chris Young is the outdoors editor for the Springfield State Journal-Register.

Where the trails are

From north to south, Illinois has an estimated 2,000 miles of bike trails — more if you count places where trails follow roadways. Even more if some unpaved multi-use trails are considered.

Here are some highlights, according to Lynn Miller of the Springfield Bicycle Club.

"Overall, I think the park districts and the Chicago metro area are doing a good job fostering bike trails," he says. "And in Madison County (just northeast of St. Louis), our bike club goes down every year to spend a weekend riding on their trail network."

Some favorites:

- Tunnel Hill State Trail in southern Illinois is an Illinois Department of Natural Resources project spanning about 45 miles.

"It's just spectacular country," Miller says. "It goes through wetlands and a couple of train tunnels and then crosses a train trestle — an old abandoned trestle that goes over a river."

"And that makes it all very scenic."

- Illinois and Michigan Canal State Trail "It's a fabulous trail along the old canal," Miller says. "There are a couple

of bridges that go into the adjacent communities north of the canal."

The trail is the former towpath that follows the edge of the canal. The out and back distance is 110 miles.

- The Hennepin Canal Trail

According to the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, the canal trail totals 104.5 miles and crosses five counties: Rock Island, Bureau, Henry, Lee and Whiteside.

- Rock River Recreational Path

This is a 10-mile trail in Winnebago County.

"And there are some other trails in the Winnebago County area," Miller says, including the Pecatonica Prairie Path and Bike Trail (18 miles) from Freeport to West Rockford.

- Forest preserve districts in the Chicago metro area

For example, the Cook County Forest Preserve District has 100 miles of paved paths and more than 200 miles of multi-use trails. The DuPage County Forest Preserve District has more than 80 miles of paved trails and the Lake County Forest Preserves has an additional 100 miles.

- Sam Vadalabene Trail

This is a 21.5-mile trail that connects Alton, Elsah and Grafton. It hugs the banks of the Mississippi and Illinois rivers and takes riders through the river bluffs of Pere Marquette State Park.

- Fox River Trail

The Fox River Trail is part of the Fox Valley Park District's network that also includes the Illinois Prairie Path, Virgil L. Gilman Trail and Waubonsie Creek Trail, for a total of more than 40 miles.

- Route 66 Trail

The storied Mother Road started in Chicago and stretched to St. Louis before continuing its journey to California.

"This one isn't complete," Miller says. "It uses the old Route 66, but it doesn't have the amenities and the nature we find along other trails."

"But it is historic, and it is something that is being promoted."

Miller says individual communities are developing their portions of the trail, keying around old stretches of the original highway that still remain.

Maps of Illinois bike trails can be found at the state Department of Transportation website, www.dot.state.il.us, as well as other Internet sites.

Chris Young

Nuclear renaissance

Illinois lawmakers consider lifting a 23-year-old moratorium on new reactors

by Jamey Dunn

After the Chernobyl and Three Mile Island disasters, public support for nuclear power dropped precipitously. But in recent years, increased demand for electricity and concerns over carbon emissions that contribute to global warming have led to a so-called nuclear renaissance.

Illinois lawmakers are considering lifting a moratorium on building new nuclear reactors that has been in place since 1987. The state is not alone. Half of the dozen or so states that placed holds on new nuclear facilities are rethinking those decisions. But the biggest question facing nuclear expansion is also the one the public is most concerned with: Where will the waste go?

Illinois' moratorium was originally meant to stay in place until the federal government came up with an answer to the waste storage issue, but that solution has not materialized. Some Illinois lawmakers are growing impatient and say the state is missing out on jobs and federal funding associated with the construction of new nuclear plants. The Illinois Senate voted to lift the ban this spring legislative session. The House has yet to take up **Senate Bill 3388**.

After touting nuclear power during his campaign for the presidency as part of a mix of options the country would need to cut carbon emissions, President Barack Obama quashed plans to create an underground repository for the long-term storage of the nation's radioactive waste at Yucca Mountain in Nevada.

The 1982 Nuclear Waste Policy Act charged the federal government with finding a place to store spent fuel, as well as waste from the production of nuclear weapons. However, as of yet, no permanent option exists for storing waste in the country. Amendments to the act in 1987 gave the Department of Energy (DOE) "the responsibility to locate, build and operate a repository for such wastes" and designated Yucca Mountain as the primary site to be studied as the potential repository, according to the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

Obama's critics have called his efforts to undermine the Yucca Mountain plan, including cutting the majority of funding to the project in his 2011 budget, politically motivated. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid from Nevada has long fought to keep the repository out of his state, which has no nuclear plants. Nevada does use electricity generated by nuclear plants in nearby states.

However, individuals on both sides of the issue agree the site was chosen without allowing enough input from Nevada citizens and is now off the table for the foreseeable future.

"One thing we learned from Yucca Mountain is that you can't jam a storage facility down anyone's throat. I think the lesson from that is these facilities will need local support," says Tom Kauffman, a spokesman for the Nuclear Energy Institute, an industry group based in Washington, D.C.

Other countries have been able to overcome the not-in-my-back-yard fears of residents and have built underground storage facilities. Finland's repository is set to be operational in 2020. Sweden's is estimated to open in 2023, and France, a leader in nuclear power technology, plans to open its repository in 2025.

"Sweden is building one now. Why can't we do that?" asks William Roy, a senior geochemist with the Illinois State Geological Survey. He says Sweden involved citizens in the process and, in the end, different areas were competing to be chosen as the storage site.

While European countries may be having more luck sorting out what to do with radioactive waste in the long term, American environmentalists say expansion of the nation's nuclear capacity before the question of permanent storage is tackled would simply be bad planning. "Would they have built the Sears Tower without bathrooms?" asks David Kraft, director of the Nuclear Energy Information Service, a Chicago-based watchdog group.

According to the Illinois Chapter of the Sierra Club, no changes that would prompt a need to lift the ban have taken place since state lawmakers passed the 1987 moratorium on new reactors.

Illinois power plants currently keep waste on site. It is kept underwater in spent fuel pools for about five years so it can cool off. Then it is moved to large containers known as dry casks.

Kraft says the casks raise security issues, especially since some are in the

flight path of Illinois airports. He says they could be targets for terrorist attacks, possibly even intentional plane crashes. "We're concerned that they are just lining [casks] up like bowling pins," Kraft says.

Roy, who also teaches a class on radioactive waste storage at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, says the casks are nearly indestructible. He says they survive such rigorous tests as collisions with trains and trucks, as well as being set on fire for hours. "The train is destroyed; the dry storage cask is dented." He says that is the case with all the tests he has seen. "[The casks] are dented. They're blackened, but they are not breached."

Those opposing new reactors are also concerned that Illinois could become a "dumping ground" for waste from other states. Kraft says relying on cask storage could lead the DOE to opt for a system of regional storage centers "while they are looking around for a suitable hole in the ground" for a repository.

He says Illinois would likely be the center for storage in the Midwest. Because Illinois, the top generator of

nuclear power in the country, has more waste to deal with, it would make sense to send in waste from other states to keep here because it would mean moving less of it around. Kraft says Illinois infrastructure, including the possibility of train and barge transport, would also make the state an obvious choice for such a facility.

According to a 2009 UIUC study called "Plan D" for Spent Nuclear Fuel," Illinois now stores waste from California, Connecticut, Minnesota and Nebraska. "We are already storing spent fuel from other states. It's already happening, and the world hasn't ended," says Roy, one of the authors of the study.

The one thing both sides can see eye to eye on is that the casks are a temporary fix. "I don't think anyone maintains that is a permanent solution. I think it is a short term solution to a bad situation," says Jack Darin, director of the Sierra Club Illinois Chapter.

Kauffman agrees. "There does need to be a repository. There has to be."

Environmentalists say the storage prob-

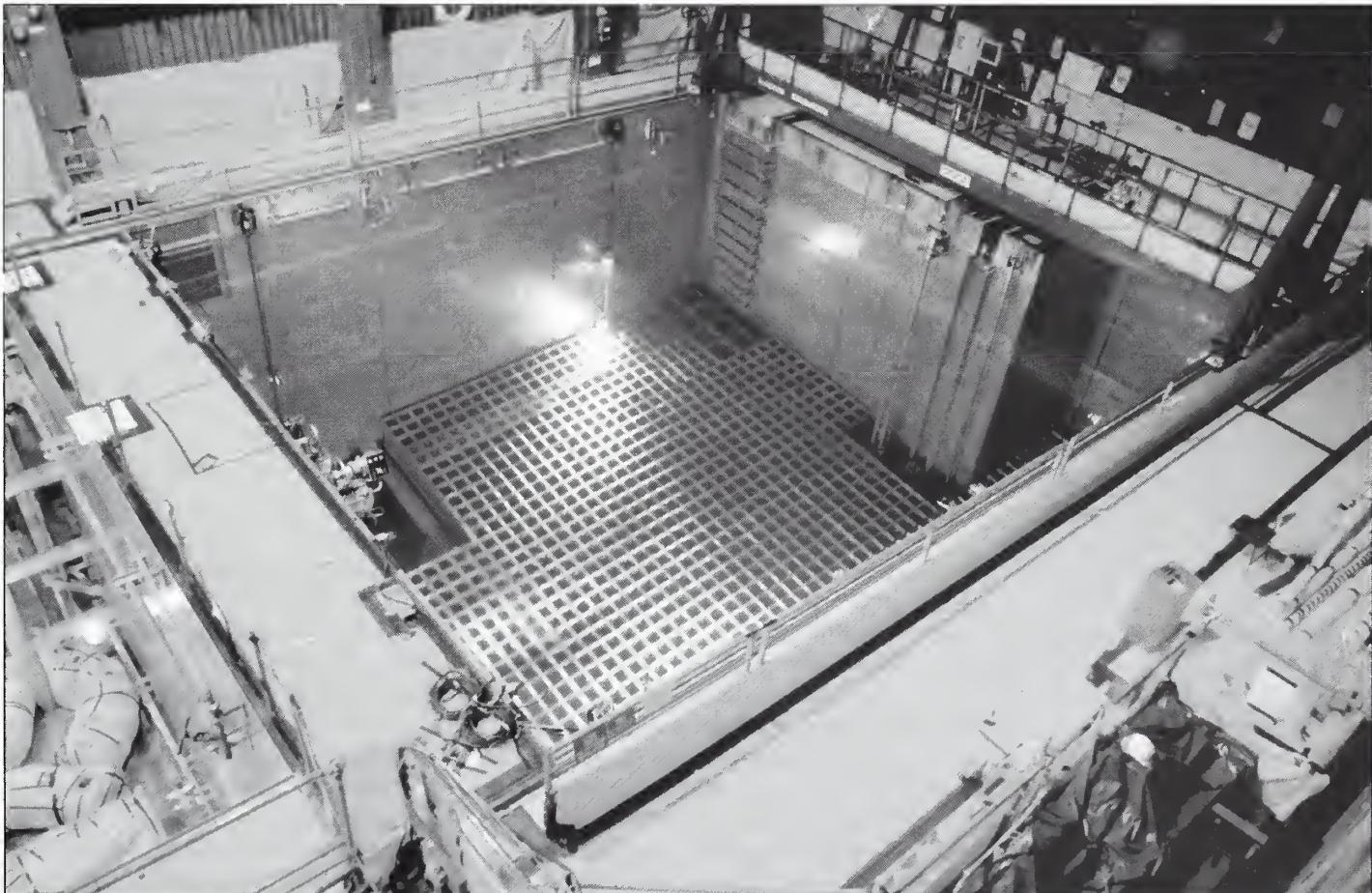
lem should put the brakes on expansion plans. But many scientists and those in the industry say building new plants will take time, and they have years to catch up on storage solutions.

"We should not hold back. We have the smarts and the experience [to find solutions.] ... It takes awhile to build a nuclear plant. So we've got time, really," Roy says.

No companies currently have plans to construct a new reactor. However, the majority of the Illinois Senate agrees they should have the option. "At the end of the day, you can spend your life worrying about imaginary horrors. Or you can spend your time moving your community forward and your state forward. We all have to heat our houses. We all have to drive our cars," says Sen. Mike Jacobs, a sponsor of **SB 3388**.

Jacobs, a Democrat from East Moline, says he has a personal interest in the safety precautions that Illinois plants take. "I live 32 miles from a nuclear plant, and I want to be safe, too. ... I want to make sure that if I am pushing something that

Photograph courtesy of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, file photograph



A pool of spent nuclear fuel



Dry casks containing radioactive waste



A tunnel through Yucca Mountain

has a downside, that we do everything in our power to minimize the downside.”

Jacobs, who also sponsored stricter regulations for the industry, says it is impeccable safety standards that will guarantee the future of nuclear power by fostering a positive public perception. He encourages those unsure about lifting the ban to visit an Illinois plant. “You get to see how much care and how much thought is given to protecting not only the community but the people that work inside these buildings.”

Roy says public perception may be the largest hurdle for nuclear expansion. “One of the biggest issues is the emotional reaction to it — the fear of the unknown.”

Darin says it is unfair to expect those residing near power plants to live with the fact that spent fuel may be stored there for years, something to which they never agreed. “It is unacceptable that this waste has piled up in our communities [because] there is currently no safe place to put it,” he says.

Jacobs says the potentially positive effects that new reactors could have in Illinois, such as job creation and economic development, outweigh the negatives. Darin says he understands it is difficult in a recession for politicians to turn their backs on “anything that sounds like it creates lots of jobs. We can understand the desire for anything that will create jobs in Illinois.” He adds that “green” energy projects, such as wind farms, are bringing new jobs to the state now.

“We are creating lots of jobs in renew-

able energy in Illinois, and I think that is proving to be a very successful pollution-free way to add energy in our grid.”

Darin says his organization is not “ruling out” nuclear power as a viable way to address global warming in the future. But he says that storage solutions must be found. “We have to solve the waste problem before we make it worse.”

In the meantime, he says, renewable sources are starting to take off and deserve focus and funding. “If we were to make a push for new nuclear, that would take so much money and attention away from these clean, safe job creators that have gotten off to a good start,” he says.

But some claim just the opposite — renewable generation has a long way to go before it can be counted upon, and strides to cut carbon emissions must be done quickly with a known reliable energy source such as nuclear power. “We don’t disfavor alternate forms of energy, but frankly, the wind doesn’t blow everyday,” Roy says.

“Nuclear at this point is by far your single largest supply of CO₂-free electricity,” says Kauffman.

A 2009 update to a study by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, titled “The Future of Nuclear Power,” warns that if the country takes too long to expand its nuclear capacity, then a shift will do little to slow global warming. “The sober warning is that if more is not done, nuclear power will diminish as a practical and timely option for deployment at a scale that would constitute a

material contribution to climate change risk mitigation.”

Those in the industry are awaiting the findings of a blue ribbon commission appointed by Obama. The group is scheduled to make its final recommendations on managing the nation’s nuclear waste in January 2012.

“There’s light at the end of the tunnel because now we are seeing movement on the national level,” Kauffman says. “I think they will come back with recommendations on what makes sense at this point.”

Kauffman says there are no guarantees that new reactors would come to Illinois. He says pushes for nuclear expansion are often backed by increased demand for electricity in a given area, and demand is down in the Midwest. “You have ample energy sources in your region.”

Kraft says there is no urgency to expand nuclear power in Illinois. “The practical standpoint of doing anything in the short term is just a zero. It’s nothing. It doesn’t even make sense.”

He is gearing up to fight the lift of the ban again during the legislature’s fall veto session. “We have been warned already by some leadership that next time it will be back.”

Jacobs is confident the moratorium will be lifted soon because he says his proposal has popular support. “Eventually, that bill will make its way to the floor of the Illinois House, and when it does, it will pass. And when it does, it is because the people of Illinois support it.” □



A 2009 aerial view of the phytoremediation project, the last stage of a land and water cleanup of a former disposal site at Argonne National Laboratory. A decade ago the area in the center, roughly outlined by the road, was all but lifeless.

Nature's nurses

Given time and tending, plants can clean the toxins from lands poisoned in the name of progress

by Beverley Scobell

The corollary to the economic development mantra “build it and they will come” is the natural law of “leave it and they will heal.”

Nature, in general, has immense restorative powers. Scientists, backed by environmental necessity and national policy, have been taking advantage of plants’ ability to remove dangerous heavy metals and chemicals from polluted soil and

groundwater. Some particular species can do it without poisoning themselves. The process is called phytoremediation, and Illinois has several brownfield sites using this “green” solution to restore land that has been mistreated in the course of progress.

As plants take up nutrients through their roots, they also collect contaminants from polluted soil, streams and ground-

water. They can clean up chemicals as deep as their roots grow. Remediation scientists use trees to reach pollution deep in the ground. Once plants and trees draw in the chemicals, they can store them in their roots, stems and leaves. They can also transform the chemicals into less harmful compounds or convert them into gases that are released into the air through transpiration (plant breathing).

However, plants are just one part of an ecology that works to restore soil and water. About an inch around each plant's root base is a community of soil microbes — bacteria, yeast, fungi — called the rhizosphere, which breaks down some chemical compounds. In return, the plants process sugars that feed the microbes.

"They form a symbiotic relationship that gets rid of an assortment of nasty stuff resulting from mismanagement over the years," says Richard Lange, a project manager for the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency.

The IEPA has been monitoring an early Superfund site in LaSalle since 1975, even before LaSalle Electrical Utilities was placed on the National Priorities List in 1982 for polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB) contamination. By 1993, soils at the 10-acre urban site had been remediated through incineration. Since then, the agency has overseen efforts to clean up the solvents in the groundwater. Two plots of trees, containing about 500 poplars and 500 willows, are part of the last phase of cleaning up the hazardous site.

PCBs belong to a broad family of human-made organic chemicals known as chlorinated hydrocarbons. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency reports that PCBs were made domestically from 1929 until their manufacture was banned in 1979. The chemicals have a range of toxicity and vary in consistency from thin, light-colored liquids to yellow or black waxy solids. Because of their non-flammability, chemical stability, high boiling point and electrical insulating properties, PCBs were used in hundreds of industrial and commercial applications, including electrical, heat transfer and hydraulic equipment; as plasticizers in paints, plastics and rubber products; and in pigments, dyes and carbonless copy paper.

PCBs have been shown to cause cancer and a number of serious noncancer health effects in animals, including effects on the immune, reproductive, nervous and endocrine systems. The EPA reports that studies in humans provide supportive evidence for the potential carcinogenicity and noncarcinogenic effects of PCBs. Also, the different health effects of PCBs may be interrelated, as alterations in one

of the body's systems may have significant implications for other regulatory systems.

As an early test plot for phytoremediation, the LaSalle site was used to discover what type of tree removes hazardous chemicals the most efficiently. IEPA scientists worked with university researchers to plant 26 varieties of willows and 16 varieties of poplar. At the time, the groundwater was found to be contaminated with tetrachloroethylene and perchloroethylene, as well as other volatile organic compounds, commonly called VOCs.

"For the most part, the trees did their job," says Lange. "Two types of poplar we found were susceptible to disease and had to be removed."

Another early project began in 1999 at Argonne National Laboratory near Lemont with a planting of about 800 hybrid poplar and willow trees. Beginning in the 1950s, Argonne had used a four-acre section of land for dumping solid and liquid waste from laboratory experiments and other activities. As a result, volatile organic compounds and tritium, a low-level radioactive isotope of hydrogen, were released into the groundwater.

Within months of planting, tests of leaves and branches revealed the trees were taking in VOCs through their roots and transporting them to their leaves, where the dangerous compounds were released very slowly and in low amounts through evaporation. Tests showed the plants also broke down and transformed compounds into less toxic chemicals.

In addition, the trees, planted deep in boreholes using a patented method, were changing the hydrology of the groundwater, keeping it from migrating out of the containment area.

"Phytoremediation is a sustainable alternative to covering the area with asphalt and pumping contaminated groundwater from containment wells underneath," says John Quinn, a hydrogeologist and a scientist on the team of experts working on the project.

This year, in its 11th growing season, the Argonne plantation site has matured, with some trees a foot in diameter and 30 feet to 40 feet tall, says Quinn.

"Both the poplars and the willows are good at remediating dissolved VOCs in

groundwater," he says. "VOC concentrations are above drinking water quality, and one goal of the plantation is to reduce the concentrations."

Years of unregulated manufacturing left Illinois with thousands of sites, called brownfields, contaminated with a witch's brew of chemicals that require remediation of some type. The IEPA generally defines brownfields as any site not being used because of environmental concerns with the potential for redevelopment.

Volatile organic compounds are a group of chemicals that contain organic carbon and readily evaporate, changing from liquids to gases when exposed to air. VOCs such as benzene, acetone, formaldehyde, toluene and carbon tetrachloride — to name just a few of the dozens of chemicals on the U.S. EPA's master list (www.epa.gov/iaq/base/voc_master_list.html) — are generally found in such solvents as dry cleaning chemicals, paint wastes, furniture strippers and carburetor cleaners. Industrial waste dumps and other waste sludges contain these solvents. They break down and enter the groundwater, potentially exposing people to serious health problems. If ingested in high enough concentrations through swallowing, breathing or absorbing them through the skin, volatile organic compounds can cause liver, kidney or central nervous system damage.

Photograph courtesy of Argonne National Laboratory



A closer look at the phytoremediation project at Argonne National Laboratory

and irritation of the lungs. They can also cause eye, nose and throat irritation, as well as headaches, nausea, dizziness and skin problems.

According to the U.S. EPA, some VOCs are suspected to cause cancer in humans and have been shown to cause cancer in animals. Studies also indicate VOCs may cause reproductive problems. The health effects caused by VOCs depend on the level and length of exposure.

Funding for the worst of the worst brownfields comes from the federal Superfund program, which was established to clean up abandoned hazardous waste sites. Illinois has 47 Superfund sites.

Congress established the fund through passage of the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act of 1980. That law was enacted in the wake of the discovery of toxic waste dumps such as Love Canal in New York and Times Beach in Missouri in the 1970s. It allows the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to clean up such sites and to compel responsible parties to perform cleanups or reimburse the government for EPA-led cleanups.

One private company using phytoremediation as part of a petroleum cleanup is BP, which owns 800 acres at the former Standard Oil/Amoco Wood River Refinery on the Mississippi River north of East



Raptors such as this juvenile red-tailed hawk now feed and nest in areas along the Mississippi River formerly contaminated with oil refining residue.

St. Louis in Madison County. The company reports it has spent \$100 million restoring the land since 2000, when the U.S. EPA named the site one of five Resource Conservation and Recovery Act brownfield remediation pilot projects.

In the spring of 2009, the company planted about 3,500 trees on a 24-acre former disposal area. "We did pilot tests for a number of years prior to implementing this large phytoremediation project," says Tom

Tunnicliff, environmental project manager for the BP facility. "So we're confident it will be successful."

Tunnicliff says the project team tested some species of perennial grasses along with trees in the pilot stage, but the "final remedy" is strictly trees. The team chose willows, cottonwood poplars, river birch, bald cypress and white swamp oak.

He says the area will become a home for wildlife and, though private property, will be aesthetically pleasing to people hiking or biking on an adjacent public trail maintained by the Army Corps of Engineers along the river.

"We're pretty excited about the project," he says. "We look forward to these trees maturing and providing both environmental and ecological benefits."

Lange says one negative aspect in using phytoremediation is that it is a long-term commitment. "You have to be patient. Trees don't work as fast as a backhoe or a bulldozer." Yet, he considers the LaSalle site a success story. "We managed to clean up about an acre of soil. We didn't dig it up and put it in a landfill. All we did was plant trees and tend to them. They did all the work for us."

Phytoremediation, he says, is an ancient process being used as an emerging technology. "Trees are solar powered, and they work for nothing. You can hardly beat that." □



A reclaimed brownfield in Madison County now supports wildlife such as these wild turkeys and Canada geese.

State tests the water

Environmentalists say new limit on phosphorus for commercial lawn care won't solve water quality problems

by Rachel Wells

In their efforts to make their grass greener than that on the other side of the fence, Illinoisans are lacing the state's lakes and streams with a chemical element, called both a nutrient and pollutant, known for choking biological diversity right out of the water.

Illinois is also sending the nutrient — phosphorus — on down the line to the Gulf of Mexico, where it exacerbates the world's second largest case of hypoxia, or low oxygen levels in the water. (See *Illinois Issues*, July/August 2006, page 13.)

Most commonly associated with the Gulf's so-called dead zone, a nearly lifeless stretch of water covering more than 6,300 square miles, hypoxia is often caused by high levels of nutrients that feed great green algal blankets. When bacteria decompose the overly abundant algae, they use all of the available oxygen, leaving nothing for other aquatic species, such as fish.

As a result, phosphorus — found naturally in the human body, our food and our waste, as well as in rock and in fertilizers — is receiving more attention lately. Illinois is the top supplier of phosphorus to the Gulf's dead zone, with 105,580 acres of assessed lakes and more than 2,000 miles of assessed streams in Illinois impaired by phosphorus. But now, the state is taking steps, however small, to reduce the element's impact.

This spring, state lawmakers pushed through Illinois' first effort to regulate fertilizer as a way to decrease nutrient pollution. If Gov. Pat Quinn signs **House Bill 6099**, commercial lawn care companies would have to test soil and find a phosphorus deficiency before they could apply fertilizer containing the element. The law would not apply to farmers or homeowners.

While environmental groups consider that measure a step in the right direction, they recognize that it can only do so much.

"The idea of limiting phosphorus that's used on turf grass seems to be low-hanging fruit," says Cindy Skrukrud, clean water advocate for the Illinois Sierra Club. But she adds that it's "another piece that we need to put in place to start ratcheting down the amount of phosphorus that leaves the land and ends up in our rivers and streams."

It's hard to say exactly what impact new limits would have, but the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency estimates a roughly 1 percent dent in the state's phosphorus pollution output.

"It may not be a huge step, it may not eliminate all the phosphorus in urban storm water, but it is a cost-effective [approach] ... that

will make a reduction," says Marcia Willhite, chief of the Illinois EPA bureau of water. The agency was officially neutral toward the legislation, but Willhite says her team supports the concept.

She says the limits on phosphorus would have the greatest effect in urban areas and in water surrounded by residential property. Those are the same areas that decades ago started targeting another product to achieve phosphorus reduction in nearby bodies of water.

In 1971, five Illinois cities started a national trend by limiting phosphorus in detergents, according to a 1999 U.S. Geological Survey review. The element had become prevalent in detergents at the end of World War II, at which point phosphorus made up 15 percent of a detergent's weight. By the time limits were introduced, the levels of phosphorus in wastewater emptied into lakes and rivers had more than tripled since 1940, with more than half of the nutrient attributed to detergents. Dishwashing detergents were not included in early limitations, but a state law effective this year would further limit phosphorus in cleaning agents.

Lawn fertilizers could become the next type of product Illinois regulates as a means to decrease the amount of phosphorus taken in by stormwater and wastewater sewage treatment plants.

As for what treatment plants put out, regulations established in Illinois in 2006 limit phosphorus levels for released wastewater, but only for new and expanded sewage treatment plants. Those limits still don't apply to the largest plants in Illinois, says the Illinois EPA. The agency estimates that roughly 5 percent to 10 percent of the state's sewage output falls under the new regulation.

"Receiving waters for those facilities that have been regulated have undergone roughly a 75 percent reduction in [phosphorus] contribution from the effluent," says Bob Mosher, Illinois EPA water quality standards manager. "However, [the limit] in the effluent is still a lot in terms of the needs of plants to grow abundantly. There are probably no instances where this reduction in [phosphorus] has caused reductions in algae growth locally."

However, tighter limits on sewage treatment plants could result in a 21 percent reduction in phosphorus pollution in the Gulf, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Science Advisory Board. "Point sources," including sewage output, account for about 34 percent of Gulf phosphorus pollution.

While treated sewage is a major contributor to phosphorus water quality problems, so too are "nonpoint sources," such as crop pro-

duction and animal manure, which top the Gulf list of phosphorus pollution sources, according to the U.S. Geological Survey.

"It's a big issue because there are so many sources, and there are many sources that we do not have direct regulatory control over, and there are many natural sources," Willhite says. "The strategy is, you work on the things you can work on."

Although the effects of Illinois' proposed turf fertilizer law may be small, the proposed regulation itself would be a big change. As of now, fertilizer regulation in Illinois is left entirely to the applicator, says Warren Goetsch, director of environmental regulation for the state Department of Agriculture.

The department would check for phosphorus testing only as an additional part of the inspections it already performs on for-hire pesticide applicators. According to the department, Illinois hosts about 34,000 licensed pesticide applicators. Many of them are individuals such as farmers, but about 3,500 treat turf commercially. Under the proposed law, those companies would operate under a default of zero phosphorus, but individual homeowners would continue to have total freedom over their fertilizer choices, and economies would continue to regulate farmers and golf course groundskeepers who use phosphorus fertilizer.

"An agricultural producer is not out to spend money that he or she doesn't need to spend," Goetsch says. "So they do indeed match their fertilizer applications to their yield goal and their soil types and their varieties that they're planting. You have an economic incentive to only use what you need."

Regardless, Illinois accounts for 12.9 percent of the total phosphorus pollution in the Gulf, according to the U.S. Geological Survey. In analyzing all states contributing to the problem, animal manure and farm crop cultivations top the list of main sources.

According to the Science Advisory Board, the prevalence of hypoxia in the Gulf — a naturally occurring biological event made worse by human contributions — has increased in the last 50 years, correlating to greater fertilizer use and changing land-use practices.

During debate before an Illinois House committee, Goetsch told lawmakers that agriculture might in the future come under closer scrutiny for its part in nutrient overloading. The turf fertilizer bill's Democratic sponsors, Rep. Brandon Phelps of Harrisburg and Sen. Michael Noland of Elgin, say they assured stakeholders that agriculture would be completely divorced from the measure.

"We have to talk about the economics of agriculture. When you're making [it] more expensive, more costly, that's going to have such a multiplier effect, not just the chemical industry but the food industry," Noland says.

And while lawn care companies and environmental groups agree that most Illinois lawns are phosphorus rich, Jean Payne, president of the Illinois Fertilizer and Chemical Association, says much of Illinois' farmland is actually phosphorus deficient.

"The bill, the intention of it was never to target agriculture," Payne says. "Unlike lawns, [farmers] are continually growing a crop from seed to harvest. ... Lawn care compared to agriculture is apples and oranges."

In 2007, the Science Advisory Board recommended a minimum 45 percent reduction in the total phosphorus pollution headed to the Gulf to reduce the size of the dead zone to a 2015 goal of 4,400 square miles, an area almost as large as the state of Connecticut. The dead zone was measured at an average of about 6,400 square miles between 2001 and 2007.

According to the Illinois EPA, across-the-board regulations that don't take into account state specifics could be detrimental to the Illinois way of life.

"If we, let's say, got a phosphorus water quality standard identical to what was being pushed down in Florida, and we were given just unlimited powers to make things come about so that we met that standard in all our streams ... Illinois would not be able to grow corn and soybeans like we do now because there would really be no way that you could do that and still meet that phosphorus standard," Mosher says. "Yeah, if we planted Illinois back to grass and trees ... but that's pretty radical."

While Illinois has made some progress toward reducing phosphorus pollution, it's also about a decade late in developing nutrient criteria standards for phosphorus levels in streams. So are 36 other states in the nation, according to a 2008 U.S. EPA inventory.

In Florida, in response to a 2008 Wildlife Federation lawsuit, the U.S. EPA recently issued criteria that state environmental officials there think are misguided and too steep. Wisconsin's EPA is reviewing proposed limits, as well, following environmental group threats of a lawsuit last year.

"We definitely think that [numeric criteria] is something Illinois needs to have in place," Skrukrud and her colleagues at the Illinois Sierra Club say. "A criteria like that is what helps drive people to make changes. ... In the meantime, without criteria, we can still be moving forward and making changes, but it can be a little more difficult."

The Illinois EPA shares the same general viewpoint but says nutrient standards and control are unique challenges.

"The water quality standard is a fundamental starting point for all of the Clean Water Act programs, but for something like nutrients, just having that water quality standard doesn't ensure that we're going to be able to implement enough actions to see improvement in water quality because we can't really get at all the sources," Willhite says. She adds that the Clean Water Act was originally designed for point-source pollution control.

Part of the trouble in developing phosphorus standards for Illinois streams is that there's no direct cause-and-effect relationship between nutrient levels and algae growth, Mosher says. While some streams inundated with phosphorus may display a green shroud, others may not. "Many streams are too shaded, too turbid, or otherwise have habitat that makes them not susceptible to growing excess algae, even though they all have very abundant nutrient concentrations present," Mosher says. Rivers also have factors such as flow speed, further complicating the equation.

Willhite says there's now an even greater sense of urgency for Illinois to adopt its own nutrient criteria standards for streams, following recent action in other states such as Florida and Wisconsin.

"If Illinois doesn't decide on its own initiative ... then either through U.S. EPA or third-party action, we may be forced to go down a road that we don't necessarily choose," she says.

The Illinois EPA will likely start planning meetings in the coming months with various stakeholders to see if there are actions the state can take that aren't necessarily outlined by the Clean Water Act, Willhite says.

"I believe that U.S. EPA will be looking around the country for other states to develop federal standards toward the end of this calendar year. I think the time is now to have these conversations and to have them very seriously." □

PEOPLE

OBITS

Eddie Washington



Eddie Washington

The first African-American state legislator from Lake County died June 4 of a heart attack. The Waukegan Democrat was 56.

"It certainly was a shock. It was saddening to lose him, especially at such a young age," says state Sen. Terry Link, who is also chairman of the Lake County Democratic Party.

An East St. Louis native, Washington moved to Waukegan in 1985, where he worked as a deputy for the Lake County sheriff's office and founded the African American Police League of Waukegan and North Chicago.

He graduated from Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, where he majored in political science and journalism.

Washington served on several legislative committees, including Prison Reform and Aging, which he chaired. Other committees he served on included Appropriations for human services and public safety, Labor, Mass Transit and Workers' Compensation.

"The sudden death of Rep. Eddie Washington comes as a shock to all of us who were fortunate to know and work with him. I have known Eddie Washington for many years as a good man with a servant's heart who worked diligently for the people of the 60th District," Gov. Pat Quinn said in a prepared statement.

Betsy Plank



Betsy Plank

The Chicagoan widely known as the first lady of public relations died May 23. She was 86.

Plank, a former longtime member of the *Illinois Issues* advisory

board, was the first woman president of the Public Relations Society of America, the first female to head a division of Illinois Bell and the first woman to be elected to the Publicity Club of Chicago. She also helped to create a student arm of PRSA, known as the Public Relations Student Society of America.

"She started out at a time when the profession was still relatively young, and so there weren't the barriers to women entering the field as there were to medicine, law," says Karla Gower, director of the Plank Center for Leadership in Public Relations at the University of Alabama, Plank's alma mater. Plank, who graduated from the university in 1944, oversaw the creation and development of the Plank Center after the UA Board of Trustees established it in her name in 2005. "If you were smart, which she was, then you would have the opportunity to be successful."

"She was a mentor to so many in the field. I remember the first time I met her, and I think everybody remembered the first time they met Betsy. She was just warm and had a great appreciation and love of people," Gower says. "She was always listening to others and made you feel as though she was just listening to you. She really guided a lot of people in their careers, helped them along the way."

Plank was also a founder of The Chicago Network, an organization of professional women started in 1979.

Shifts at the top

William Cunningham, former chief of staff for Cook County Sheriff Tom Dart, was tapped to replace **Robert Reed** as communications director for Gov. Pat Quinn. Cunningham was the Illinois political director for U.S. Sen. John Kerry's 2004 presidential campaign. Reed left his job in early June to return to the private sector.

John Schomberg has assumed the role of acting general counsel for the governor. Schomberg, who had been a deputy counsel in Quinn's office, replaces **Theodore Chung**, who is returning to private practice.

Straight from the Statehouse bureau...



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Southern Illinois teen wins stamp contest

In southern Illinois, surrounded by woods, swamps, prairies and bluffs, 17-year-old **Abraham Hunter** finds his inspiration.

The Vienna resident, son of Riek and Karla Hunter, is both a painter and a conservationist. And for the third year in a row, he's the winner of Illinois' Federal Junior Duck Stamp Design Contest best in show award. His acrylic painting, *Bluewing Takeoff*, advanced to national competition, where it placed in the top 10.

"God gave us a beautiful nature to enjoy and tend ourselves," Hunter says. "It's one of my top priorities to show people what God has given us, unspoiled."

The message he wrote to accompany his winning piece says: "Conservation is giving back to creation what it has given to us."

The three-time state winner took second place in the federal competition last year and an honorable mention the year before.

Illinois Department of Natural Resources education specialist Joe Bauer

says the competition is "a great way for [youth] to be able to explore some new things that they might not have thought about before and to get [them] into the wonderful world of wetlands and waterfowl."

Hunter has been immersed in nature for most of his life and credits his family and community for their support, advice and critiques.

"It began whenever my dad ... liked to take us out there just to see the deer," Hunter says. "That's where I began my love for the outdoors." His first pencil drawings were mainly historical images, with squirrels serving as "the good guys" and rats as the bad. But in 2006, after living in another, less naturally lush state for a couple of years, he switched to paint and began making wildlife the focus of his work.

After researching his subjects, which also include deer, turkeys and rustic scenery, Hunter says he works to infuse his paintings with real-life detail. In his 2010 duck stamp entry, he made sure to bring attention to conservation efforts by placing

a band around one of the duck's legs and a national wildlife refuge sign in the background.

"I've had several people say how it would be a shame to lose this, when they look at my paintings," Hunter says, explaining that he tries to bring a sense of peace to his work. "That's what they like to see in it, and that's what they need to see so that we don't lose this."

Hunter, who has won numerous competitions and who donates paintings to multiple conservation groups for use on greeting cards, T-shirts and pamphlets, plans to use his talents to fill his own gallery and sell prints of his work.

The annual Federal Junior Duck Stamp Contest is in its 17th year and includes all 50 states, the District of Columbia and two U.S. territories. Each year, about 500 students in kindergarten through 12th grade participate in Illinois' segment of the competition. The top national winners receive cash prizes and a trip to Washington, D.C., for a ceremony commemorating the stamp's first day of sale.

Rachel Wells

Image by Abraham Hunter, courtesy of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources



Others not listed have shown leadership

It is absolutely irresponsible that your recent story, "Wanted: Leadership" (see *Illinois Issues*, May, page 16), did not include former Gov. Richard Ogilvie, who demanded the state address its budget imbalances and pushed through income taxes. A gutsy position that cost him his career.

Your list should also have included former U.S. Sen. Charles Percy, who established and set the national standard for merit-based judicial appointments, abolishing the political patronage corruption that dominated the federal bench prior to his tenure. Both men addressed the problems they saw in Illinois and courageously worked hard to change status quo behavior.

Maybe if we gave these former "moderate" Republicans their due, we would have a stronger two-party system that offers real checks and balances on power and corruption.

*Patrice Bugelas-Brandt
Winnetka*

Cutting PE in schools is pound foolish

Jamey Dunn is correct in noting in your May 2010 issue (see *Illinois Issues*, page 6, "School choice no longer just a GOP idea") that concern about "unfunded mandates" is increasingly bipartisan. In fact, it has become the "flavor of the month" — this session's favorite punching bag.

While we wholeheartedly agree that elected officials should do more to prioritize educational requirements, we are very concerned with the current situation. It seems that physical education is a top requirement many school administrators want to see gone. While cutting PE may be penny wise, it is certainly pound foolish. With obesity-related health care costs skyrocketing, less and less money will be left for education.

Taxpayers will pay either way. We can invest in PE now or pay for health care later. Those who seek to cut PE are

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Your comments are welcome. Please keep them brief (250 words). We reserve the right to excerpt them.

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Charles N. Wheeler III



Unbalanced budgets come despite constitutional mandate

by Charles N. Wheeler III

Does the Illinois Constitution mandate that the state budget be balanced each year?

One's initial inclination is to respond, "Yes, of course, it says so in the Finance Article." But a quick check of the actual record in the four decades since the charter was ratified suggests the answer is a bit less straightforward.

The question gained new interest a few weeks ago after House Speaker Michael Madigan acknowledged to reporters that the spending plan newly minted by legislative Democrats was not balanced.

"Will there be people who would say the budget is not in balance? That's correct, because we are in a depression," the speaker said.

While his candor may have been refreshing, Madigan was merely stating what was obvious to anyone paying attention, as lawmakers for the second year in a row chose to let Gov. Pat Quinn make the painful cuts needed to align spending more closely with revenues.

How bad are things? The mismatch exceeds \$12 billion, according to the Center for Tax and Budget Accountability, a nonpartisan think tank. That is more than 40 percent of the total \$26.3 billion appropriated from the state's main checkbook account.

So is the spending plan null and void, as some have suggested, because the Constitu-

While the FY 2010 budget may be perhaps the most egregious example of how lawmakers can circumvent the supposed constitutional requirement for a balanced budget, it's far from unique.

tution requires that the budget be balanced?

Not really. Consider the language of Article VIII, Finance, section (b): "The General Assembly by law shall make appropriations for all expenditures of public funds by the State. Appropriations for a fiscal year shall not exceed funds estimated by the General Assembly to be available during that year."

The language clearly says that lawmakers can't authorize spending more money in a budget year than they expect the state will have available to cover that spending during that year. Strange as it may seem, the out-of-whack plan lawmakers sent to Quinn in May passes. At \$26.3 billion, the general funds appropriations fall short of the \$26.7 billion expected to be available in FY 2011. In addition, lawmakers approved a trio of one-time ploys —

offering amnesty to delinquent taxpayers, selling long-term rights to the tobacco settlement proceeds and raiding other treasury accounts — to boost the bottom line by \$2.5 billion, according to the center.

So, one could argue, the plan meets the narrow constitutional test: General funds appropriations do not exceed the funds estimated to be available this budget year.

Then what's the catch? The legislature simply ignored certain inescapable expenses, appropriating no money, for example, to cover some \$6 billion in unpaid bills from FY 2010, which ended June 30, or to make a required pension payment of almost \$4 billion.

While the FY 2011 budget may be perhaps the most egregious example of how lawmakers can circumvent the supposed constitutional requirement for a balanced budget, it's far from unique.

In fact, the state has not had a balanced budget since 2001, when measured by a traditional yardstick, the so-called budgetary balance concept. Typically applied to the general funds, the technique compares how much is in the bank when a fiscal year ends on June 30 with how much is needed to pay bills still outstanding from that fiscal year during the following two months. If there's enough to cover the bills, the budget's balanced; if not, it's a budgetary deficit.

In the 41 years since Illinois adopted its current practice of annual budgets, starting with FY 1970 and running through FY 2010, the general funds budget has been balanced only 15 times. Most of the black ink occurred in two distinct eras, a six-year stretch from FY 1970 through FY 1975 and a five-year run from FY 1997 through FY 2001.

In each of the other 26 years, the outstanding bills at year's end outstripped the money available in the bank. The worst deficit came in FY 2009, at a whopping \$3.7 billion, more than triple the previous high. That mark could well fall come August 31, when the books finally are closed on FY 2010.

The state's long history of budgetary deficits shows that the constitutional mandate has had little practical effect in guaranteeing that spending won't outstrip resources. The record should not be surprising, given that the constitutional provision deals with estimates and has no mechanism to adjust for faulty prognostication.

In the spring of 2001, for example, Gov. George Ryan and lawmakers fashioned a

FY 2002 budget anticipating that revenues would increase by about \$900 million. Instead, revenues declined by more than \$700 million due to recession and the September 11 terrorist attacks. The result was some \$1.6 billion less to spend than the budget allocated, leading to a \$1.2 billion budgetary deficit, at the time the worst in state history.

At other times, the temptation to fudge the numbers has been hard to resist, tweaking revenue estimates upward to allow more spending, or downplaying the growth in an entitlement program to shoehorn more into a tight budget.

The possibility of such shenanigans was not lost on the delegates who drafted the 1970 Constitution, several of whom had legislative experience.

During floor debate on the Finance Article, delegate Louis Bottino, a former two-term state representative, noted that one of the ways to present a balanced budget "is to take such things as pensions and not appropriate the amount that is necessary for the state to finance its share."

Did the committee that fashioned the

new article consider this? he asked delegate Dawn Clark Netsch, who was presenting the panel's work to the full convention.

"You are right that there is no way to enforce a standard of absolute intellectual integrity on all of the people who are involved in the state financial management if they choose not to respond that way," answered Netsch, who went on to become a state senator and who, later, as state comptroller in the early 1990s, had to deal with bills piling up with no money to pay them.

"We have freely admitted among ourselves that you can balance a budget by simply raising your estimates of what the various taxes will bring in," she told Bottino. "I am not sure the Constitution can really deal with that. In fact, I am sure it cannot really deal with that kind of problem."

Still a valid assessment, 40 years later. □

Charles N. Wheeler III is director of the Public Affairs Reporting program at the University of Illinois Springfield.



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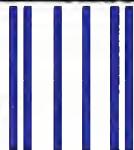
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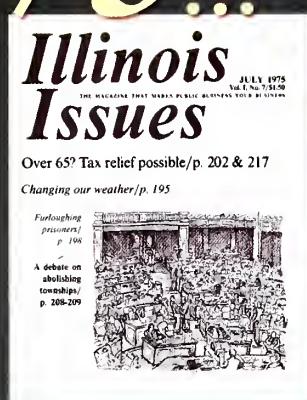
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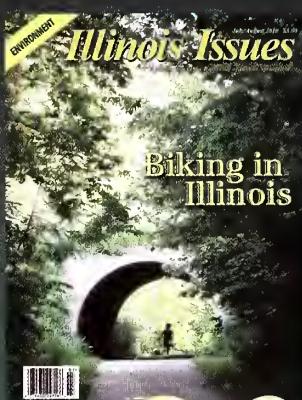
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